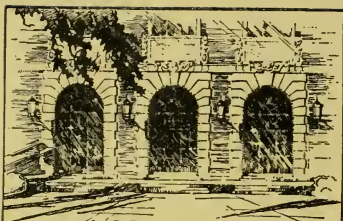


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I N G E L H E I M

“ Physician. Time is a skilful weaver, but there is a saying your Majesty may have heard, that he does not work until we have ceased to watch him.

“ Queen. True, and yet let him work as skilfully as may be, he does, at the best, but put a patch into our torn raiment. The thorns and briars of the world have done their evil work: he cannot make whole again, he can only disguise; the rent remains for all his workmanship.

“ Physician. Alas! your Majesty, the hour soon comes in which we realise that we cannot find our way through the world with untorn garments, and so learn to be grateful even for the patches of the great weaver.”—From THE COURT PHYSICIAN.

I N G E L H E I M

BY THE
AUTHOR OF 'MISS MOLLY'

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. III.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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INGELHEIM.



CHAPTER XXXII.

“The world is wide,
And if at last these hands, these lips, shall meet,
What matter thorny ways and weary feet?”

WHEN the news reached Rome and was told to Dolores, and she understood the calamity that had befallen the Princess, realised at length—for it was hard to realise—that the sunny-haired child, with his alternating quaint gravity and mirthfulness, had passed beyond the curtain, it was a surprise to herself how much pain it cost her.

She did not cry, she was not given to tears; the few she had shed at the news of Antoine's death had been quickly dried in the happier thoughts of Emilie's little baby; to the thought of that sorrow she had grown gradually accustomed, there had never been any possible escape from it; the shadow had been stealing nearer, inch by inch, ever since

she could remember; and she knew, though his wife might sorrow and trouble now, by-and-by for her would come the natural consolation that follows on such sad foreseen disasters. Love's consecrating touch, in the course of years, rendering holy the work of Time's withering hand.

But this was quite different; here no gradually approaching shadow had prepared the way. Standing in the full glory of sunlight, his eager childish eyes embracing all around—heaven scarce distinguishable from earth in his happy ignorance—he had paused with awe-struck looks, the curtain lifted in his hand, and then scarce heeding on which side he stood, had dropped it, and lo, had passed beyond the sight of those who loved him.

There was an ache at her heart for many and many a day; perhaps, amongst his many mourners, none mourned him more truly than the little English girl. She was not imaginative, but standing in the brilliantly lit rooms at Casa Julia, she would again and again feel the touch of the childish hand, which had so often rested on hers, hear the courteous grave words, so oddly out of keeping with the eager blue eyes, the childish impatience, that was restrained by such decorous courtesy.

The poor Princess. The tragedy which had bared her life, and which she could only dimly appreciate, yet wrung her heart whenever she thought of it. Some subtle bond of sympathy met and sorrowed with her sorrow, and drew her closer to the Countess

Miramar, than had hitherto been possible. It was strange, but in this impersonal grief for a sorrow that scarcely touched, and could not affect their lives, these two understood each other better than through all their own cares and joys.

Speaking or hearing of that desolate mother, touched some vibrating chord in Justine Miramar's heart, which, thus touched, ached and throbbed as of old; in some inexplicable way, that ache was not alone for the Princess, but for her own little dark-eyed baby.

When her thoughts had strayed so far, there was a quick pang of self-reproach, as, lifting her eyes, they rested on Dolores's smooth head and the gentle eyes she was learning to love. But the girl did not see or follow the workings of the woman's mind. The sympathy was sweet, and though she did not interpret why, she *felt* that besides the love and sympathy, which were always awaiting her, there was something that drew them nearer together—mutual understanding. For the first time she felt a sort of vague regret, when the Countess went, as was her custom, to the service at St Antonio. Hitherto, she had scarcely given it a thought; this was only another case of other people's ways being different "from my ways," according to Emilie's creed. Countess Miramar was a Roman Catholic, and went to her church; she, Dolores, was a staunch little Protestant Churchwoman, brought up amongst Church people, whose opinions she reflected, and to whose

early teaching she strictly adhered; it was not her way to think out new things for herself, so just what she had done year by year in the old country parsonage, so she did now under the shadow of St Peter.

Her maid, a cheerful, red-cheeked, English girl, took her to church twice every Sunday, where she listened attentively to the service, and strove to profit by the sermon, and always added a little prayer of gratitude for the many kind friends who had been given her. That prayer was an innovation since her arrival in Rome; the little light from the world that she had seen had thrown a new light on the kindness that had saved her from the work-house. After church, if it was fine, there was often a walk with Susan Langford, who fretted a little after England and home, and was glad to talk of the enchanted glories of farm-life, as they had begun to appear through the mists of absence; and to her, Dolores could freely talk of many things that troubled her, and in her she found a sympathetic listener to the story of the little Prince.

On her return home there was tea and talk with the Countess Miramar. At Beverley the Sunday had always been strictly kept, the reading had been selected; with church and Sunday-school, and learning of collects and catechism, time had not hung on hand: here it was different. There were many hours during the day when she found herself wishing some one would tell her what to do. The walks with Susan were a boon, though at first with

a little pang she had remembered the displeasure that had darkened many a Sunday of Jem's rare holidays, when he had held aloof from church-going, and had started off for a walk instead. He had not argued or answered, but he had taken his own way, and the vague remembrance of it haunted Dolores yet.

Still it was different; she had been to church first! For other matters, they were beyond her province to decide, she had only to obey. So Sunday after Sunday, she came down in her white muslin gown and talked to the Countess's guests,—there were always friends every Sunday evening,—and when asked, she stood up and sang for them. She was glad, dear Dolores, that she only had been taught sacred music. It could not be wrong to do anything that a good woman like the Countess asked her to do,—but still—she was glad that they were all pleased to listen to sacred music.

All this had sufficed hitherto, but when that afternoon the Countess drove off to her church, she wished, just for a moment, that they could have said their prayers together, when both their hearts were alike full of the same trouble. The Countess wished it too, with all the strength of her strong will; that she, a devout Catholic, the child of a Church which had saved her from despair all these torturing years should have a daughter who did not own the same Church, was constant pain and grief to her. But true to her determination, which her own strong

will enabled to carry out, she forbore to say a word. She felt that bewilderment, perhaps severance, would follow the word, and despite the divided interests, at present every step seemed bringing them closer together, and it was for that her soul craved.

So Dolores watched her drive away, and then, left to herself, sat down to write one of those letters which, even when to Emilie, were so difficult of composition ; but then Emilie did not criticise, only rejoiced over the childish letters, and answered them at once, replying to the questions, understanding as if by instinct all that she wished to know.

When the Countess returned, it was already dusk ; the light of sunset, clear and brilliant, was lying across the streets, red sunset clouds were streaking the western sky. She was not thinking of the beauty of the evening, however, though her eyes were lifted, and she was only vaguely conscious of the windless evening, of the air scented with spring flowers. She was at peace herself ; nature's calm seemed a reflection of some stillness that had touched her own soul in the solemn shadows of the darkened church. We are so much a part of the world we live in, that it is only natural we should reflect nature's moods, probably we do, much oftener than we are aware of. It is on looking back to some unaccustomed, peaceful hour, when our troubled souls were at rest, that we are inclined, with fuller knowledge, to forget the peaceful brilliance of a fair summer dawn, or the

tender calm of sunset, which shed their beauty on the remembered hour, and only speak of the presage of some coming joy, which knew fulfilment later on, and of which we are prone to believe the air was rife.

“There is a lady, a Sister, waiting to see you,” the man said, as he opened the door. “She had business, and wished to wait.”

“I will go to her at once; let the signorina know that afterwards I shall be glad of her company in my boudoir.”

She walked slowly towards the room where her visitor awaited her. She was scarcely thinking of her. So many Sisters and religious ladies sought out the rich, charitable Countess Miramar; her help in all these years had never been asked in vain, above all when asked in the name of little, homeless, hungry children. In helping them, she would think with a stab of pain—“Who knows but that I am putting bread into the mouth of my own lost baby! Ah, God knows, no child shall ever hunger, while I can prevent it!”

And now there was no grudging of the thank-offering: to look at Dolores’s sweet, innocent eyes, and listen to her young soft voice, was to recognise the great debt she owed the whole world, which had inspired the goodness that had saved her from the terrible fate that might have overtaken her helpless babyhood.

In the library, a large, rarely used room, lined with

books, was seated in the great leather arm-chair a small elderly woman, in the dress of a religious Order.

She rose up nervously as the door opened, was so visibly nervous and distressed, that the Countess became at once aware of the fact. "Sit down," she said, kindly; "I am afraid I have kept you waiting. But I was at church. You wanted to see me on business?"

"Yes." The Sister's voice was gentle and careworn, her eyes, still troubled, sought the lady's. "I have come from St Benoît to see you."

"That is a long way. You will let me order you a cup of coffee, and then we can talk afterwards."

"No, no; please, no." There was no doubt about her distress; her voice trembled with emotion. "Yes, I am tired," as the Countess began something to that effect. "I am not used to travelling and hurrying too," with a nervous attempt at a smile, "but I cannot rest or eat until I have spoken—told you my business."

"Speak, Sister," the Countess said, gently and gravely, seating herself by the small troubled woman; a beautiful figure in her rich sables and black velvet, her compassionate eyes turned encouragingly towards her visitor, grave, for even yet she had not acquired a facility in smiling.

"Years ago," the gentle tremulous voice began, as if reciting a carefully conned lesson, "you had a little daughter, and lost her——"

The words were so different from those she had expected, that the Countess's expression changed. Into her dark eyes came a sudden, anxious look, which did not escape her companion.

"I lost her," she said, quietly, "but I have found her."

"Ah, no, no," cried the other woman, swiftly. "No; you think you have, but you are wrong, wrong." She rose at the impetuous words, as if to sit still were no longer possible. Under the strict sombre attire her woman's heart throbbed, some tender softening that was almost maternal shone in her eyes, her hands were clasped together.

"It came to us—the news"—she began in quick, feverish tones, "quite lately. We do not hear much that goes on in the world, but the story of the good lady finding her little daughter, after so many years, reached us, and when it did, and we had heard the whole story, we felt that we must come and tell you another story."

"What other story have you to tell?" The Countess had risen too; her voice was calm and cold, but she was white, white to her very lips, and the very self-control which forbade all display of emotion was terrifying to her visitor.

"Oh, madame," she faltered, "do not be angry. It was right to find you and tell you; it seemed right, but it made my heart bleed. She is mine, my convent child. I love her; God, how I love her! She is dear to me, as children are to their mothers."

The passionate, tender, southern voice ceased. Countess Miramar's, grave and distinct, followed—

“Of course it was right to come, but you are mistaken. I have found my own little loved daughter.” There was a jealous swiftness in the last words, as between them came a vision of Dolores's trusting eyes.

“Listen—first let me speak, madame.” There was no thought of reseating themselves; close together, facing each other, the two women stood—the little, round-faced, anxious-eyed woman in the rusty black of her conventual garb, the pale aristocrat in her velvet and fur, and the last rays of sunset enveloping them both in the same red flame, as it entered the room, gilding and reddening its dark corners.

“Fourteen years ago,” she began, her eyes on the lady's face, “very late, a lady came to our convent, and begged shelter for the night. We are very poor; we live a long way from any one, except those poorer than ourselves, whom we nurse and teach, but still we always keep a guest-room, though it is not often needed. The lady had with her a baby, a little girl of two years old——”

There was a quick-drawn breath, and the narrator paused, as if expecting words to follow, but none came.

“The lady was young and handsome. We thought, of course, though she did not say so, that the child was hers. In the morning——”

“What was the lady like?”

“She was young and slight, with a white skin, no colour on her cheeks, and beautiful, beautiful red-brown hair. I waited on her; she was a stranger—she spoke with a strange accent. The baby”—the voice that had grown calmer trembled again, there was a throb of tenderness under every word—“but the baby was different; it was dark, with dark curls lying close to its head, and had arched brows over eyes as black as night, and a red curved mouth like a pomegranate flower.”

The lady stirred—again that quickly held breath—and her eyes shifted till they had left the woman’s eager face, and were turned to the red glare of sunset.

“When morning came and I went to the room to see if the lady had slept well and needed anything, she had disappeared; somehow in the early dawn she had made her way out unseen, only the baby, smiling and talking to itself, sat alone in the empty bed.”

The speaker’s cold hand had clasped the slender gloved hand of the Countess.

“We have kept her ever since—she is our daughter, our child: we love her, love her, but it was right for you to know.”

“She is *not* my child.” To her own ears her voice sounded harsh and discordant, “*my* little daughter has been found.”

“We have the little garments the child wore on

the night she came," the other woman went on, unheeding of the interruption; "a mother would recognise, even after many years, the little things her baby wore," and she clasped her hands with a passionate movement to her breast, as she spoke. "She would never forget."

"Never forget." It was like an echo, so faint and far off, but it was Justine Miramar who had spoken.

"The child is seventeen years old now, she is a daughter of the convent, but she has no call to the life. She must go out into the world and make her living; it breaks my heart, but so it must be. But first, madame must see her and judge, however unhappy madame may be, she must be just."

"I must be just," she repeated, as if all power of inventing words had forsaken her.

She walked over to the window and stood unseeing, as if blinded in the glare, a faint, red stain on either cheek, which might have been the outward sign of some scarcely mastered emotion, or merely a reflection from the dying sun, but however disturbed and bewildered her mind was, it was only of Dolores she could think. She was physically tired, as she returned to her visitor's side.

"You will eat something, Sister," she said, "and rest a little, then I will come back, and we will see what it is best to do."

"But you will return with me and at once," the other insisted.

“Yes, that would be best.”

“She has been my child, I have taught her and cared for her from babyhood; the convent adopted her, but it was I who brought her up,” with a sorrowful smile, “my heart breaks when I think of parting with her, but if it is to her mother, that would be best.”

At the word the Countess shivered. “I will return,” she said, “I must think.”

But thinking did no good. “It is a mistake, of course.”

Who was the ruddy-haired stranger? Probably the mother. Some sad common story of betrayal and desertion, and a helpless woman left with an unwelcome child to give point to the tale; a sudden decision when she found herself amongst these kind gentle nuns, and she had escaped, trusting her child's future to their charitable care.

Yes, of course, that was all, but she must make the journey nevertheless. This good, kind woman's mind must be set at rest.

“Good-bye, Dolores; I am very sorry to leave you, but it is on a matter of business that this lady has come about, which no one can do for me. You will amuse yourself as well as you can with your music and lessons. I shall not delay; you may expect me back in three days. In the meantime, I have written to Carlos to come and see you.”

Then she kissed the girl, and with Sister Agnes and Hester drove away into the night.

She had suggested that they should wait for the morning, and that her visitor should have a night's rest before taking another journey, but half-heartedly, a portion of the feverish impatience that possessed Sister Agnes seemed to have found its way into her own heart; so advantage had been taken of the night express which landed passengers on the way to Marseilles, at this small station, from whence there was a ten-mile drive to the little convent in the hills.

All through the long hours of the night, she had never closed her eyes, but had sat staring out into the darkness.

"I would rather be alone," she had said, so her companions had gone elsewhere. The stoppages and change of trains had scarcely made more impression than if they had been part of a dream. It was all a dream. "What was she doing here?" she thought impatiently, as at length the final stage of the journey was entered on, and in a rickety old carriage, she and her two companions drove away through the chill evening air towards the convent of Notre Dame du Salut.

It was nine o'clock when at length the two hours' silence was broken by their arrival before the low unpretentious dwelling. They were evidently unexpected; the only gleam of light was a spark that shone through the narrow window of the chapel, there was silence after the driver had knocked, then steps across an uncarpeted stone floor.

Sister Agnes, who had left the carriage, offered some hasty explanation to the door-opener, who vanished immediately, but before the Countess had descended, had returned to her place.

"I have sent to warn the Mother," she said, and Sister Agnes ushering them in, preceded them down a long dark passage, and then opening a door, showed them into a bare whitewashed room, a few common prints on the walls the only attempt at ornament.

"Madame will wait here," she said, "and I will see that some supper is prepared for her."

"Is it too late," the Countess questioned,—again she was startled at how dry and harsh her voice sounded,—“can I see her to-night?”

"You shall see her," the other woman answered; "you shall not wait. I will send her to you. The Mother is ill," she came back presently to say, "and has gone to bed. I have told her that I will see to your comfort, and that you will wait and speak to her in the morning."

"Do not disturb her, pray," the Countess replied, "I can see her to-morrow."

By-and-by a girl came in and began laying the table, and making preparations for supper. It was a long time since she had eaten anything, and she was wearied of course, and sleepy probably, if she had had time to think of it,—if this meeting was over, till then——

She was still standing where Sister Agnes had left

her. There were a couple of chairs in the room, and a narrow untempting-looking sofa, but the idea of seating herself even had not come. She was standing by the small-paned curtainless window, through which a full moon shone in. If it had not been for the light from the common guttering candles which fell on the table, the squares of moonlight on the floor would have been hard and clear,—as it was, they were faint and ghostly. They reached to her feet she noticed.

Once more Sister Agnes was by her side, her voice in her ear.

“She was asleep, madame, Mother had told her nothing, it was better not. I woke her, and said a lady wished to speak to her,—when I go she will come to you. Afterwards madame had better rest, she looks grievously tired.”

“Yes, I am tired,” she answered,—and then the door had closed again and she was alone—a ray of moonlight had reached her now, and like a line of silver lay across the sombreness of her black gown.

A sound. She turned her eyes quickly from the convent garden, and as she did so the door was softly opened, and a girl in some quaint white flannel semi-conventual gown, entered the room.

Inside she hesitated, her hand still on the lock, whilst her eyes sought the woman standing in the window. Eyes dark as night, under delicate arched brows; a low broad forehead, round which clustered close dark curls, still damp and dishevelled with

sleep; the colour on either oval cheek that of an awakened child, the red mouth arched like a Cupid's bow. There was wonderment in the eyes which the straight black lashes shaded, some faint tone of surprise in the voice that questioned, "Madame wished to see me?"

Justine Miramar was a strong woman; she had rebelled and struggled and fought against her fate, but in all the time it had been with strength, now it required years of training to call up that strength. She clasped her hands in the effort to keep control over herself, she strove to speak, but the voice that said "Come to me," was scarcely audible, even to herself—"I am over-tired, and losing control over myself in consequence; this is no reality, but a vision born of fever and fatigue." For what she saw was not the fresh young face of the daughter of the convent, but the dark eyes that had won her girlish heart, the soft curls that she had often kissed, the brilliant beauty that had been buried in her young husband's grave.

"Juan, Juan!" she cried, covering her face with her hands, and a great tearless sob escaped her.

"Madame is ill—madame wished to see me." Juan's voice.

The girl was close beside her now; the dark eyes were looking anxiously at the bowed figure, the slender young hands were striving tenderly to help her.

"Sit down, dear madame; you are ill, tired. Let me unfasten your cloak, and get you a glass of wine.

Mother has such good wine for her guests,—you will feel better directly.”

Under the girl's guidance she was seated now on the narrow hard sofa; she could, in truth, stand no longer.

“Yes, get me a glass of wine, dear child,” she said, “I am very tired.” But when the girl, kneeling on the floor by her side, essayed to rise, she suddenly prevented her, clasping her arms about her neck, drawing the soft tangled curls closer, till they were pressed to her heart. “You are mine, mine,” she said,—“they cannot take you from me!”

Freed from the embrace, the girl did not rise from where she knelt, only lifted her head and tossed back the loose locks, with a bewildered look in her dark eyes—Juan Miramar's eyes! “Who are you?” she said, low and quickly—the echo of Juan's voice; “do you come from my mother——”

“Ah, cannot you feel it?” Justine Miramar's arms were round the girlish figure, holding her in a close embrace. “You must, you do! I am your mother!”

Yes, something had stirred, and spoken with the unfaltering voice of assurance; it scarcely needed the sight of the little garments so carefully treasured to convince. They were only reason building up the heart's instinct; but *they* were not the proof. The proof lay deeper—it shone out of every glance of the

dark eyes, the ready tears and smiles which were the reflection of every passing mood,—the quick southern gestures and ready caresses.

“Mother, I must call you mother at once, and say it very often, because there are so many years that it has been unsaid. No, I have nothing else to say, except that I have brought you these violets; let me put them in your dress, you must not wear black.”

Kneeling beside her, she began deftly arranging the flowers amid the Countess’s lace, her long slim hands doing their task well.

“Let me look at you,” Justine said, as she said a hundred times a-day.

Even in the plain flannel dress, a beautiful figure, the loose sleeves falling back from the round white arms, the thick disordered curls escaping in all directions from the quaint cap that she always wore.

“Ah yes, a beautiful girl,” the mother’s proud heart acknowledged.

It was hours and hours before she thought of Dolores, of whom her heart had previously been so full. In the uncarpeted bare room she told Marie the story.

—“We christened her, and called her Marie Adios,” Sister Agnes had told her, for the convent child it had seemed the most appropriate name;—and when she had finished, Marie’s eyes were full of tears, and her long lashes wet.

"Oh, poor Dolores!" she said, tenderly; "but after all, you cannot leave off being fond of her, can you? And now she will have me for a sister."

Her arms were round her mother's neck, her soft lips pressed to her cheek.

"But you must not look for any more daughters," and she smiled that wonderful, brilliant smile, that Justine remembered so well, "or I shall be jealous. Dolores is good, I am sure; I don't think *she* will be. Mother, did I say that right? How do I speak English? I am learning, because I am going to be a governess."

"Not now," the Countess answered, gently.

"No, not now. Now we will go home. Ah," suddenly breaking off and resuming French, "but it will be a grief, a dreadful grief to go! You do not mind my saying so? I kiss you many, many times instead; only—I love them all."

But when the day of departure came, it was not the girl's vehement grief that oppressed the Countess.

Those tears would dry; already there was an instinct to turn and seek for comfort in caresses, to the new-found mother. No, it was not for her Justine grieved as she said good-bye to the little company of nuns—the Mother, so old and careworn, her kind grave face showing signs of strong restrained emotion; Sister Agnes, worn with sleepless, tearful nights.

"She is yours," she sobbed; "it is right you should have her; but oh, madame, forgive me that I cannot be glad. She has been mine for so many years."

"I shall not forget it," Justine answered, gently. She kissed her for good-bye, then turned her eyes away, so that she should not see the good-bye that followed.

The little hood that it was customary for Marie Adios to wear beyond the convent doors was pushed back, her face was flushed, the tears coursing down her cheeks, as they drove away from the old convent of Notre Dame du Salut; but when a turn in the road had hidden it from sight, she flung herself, still sobbing, into her companion's arms, and "Mother, mother!" she cried—other words seemed impossible, except that cry for comfort.

There was something childlike in the cry and the embrace, which Justine Miramar recognised. She drew the flushed tearful face closer to her. With her arm round her, holding her thus close to her heart, there came out of the past, clear and distinct, the memory of long-past, never-to-be-forgotten days, when she had first known the joys of motherhood.

As the girlish sobs grew calmer, and the slight figure folded to her heart was quieted, she felt some reflection of that long-missed tenderness and dependence which is the happy reward of maternal love.

There was another long journey, but this time not alone. Tired and excited, Marie slept, her rounded cheek on her hand, her hood always slipping back, and the dark curls straying in pretty confusion; and opposite Justine Miramar sat and watched her, no doubt in her heart to torment these long dark hours, but the certainty of motherhood to console her for the bygone years.

Over and over again in the darkness she went over the details of the past, striving to fit in the links of the story, but unavailingly.

“Who was the ruddy-haired woman who had taken the child to the little convent and left her there? What had been her object, and was she the thief herself who had committed the crime, and desolated so many years of her life? And if not, who and what was she? and how had she become possessed of the child?”

Justine wondered and thought, but fruitlessly. She held no clue wherewith to unravel the mystery.

“She may not have meant evil,” Sister Agnes had suggested with kindly charity; “she may have slipped away to find the mother, and tell her where her baby was hidden,—and then, who knows, perhaps death came before she had time to set things right.”

With such vague hopes she had to rest content. The curtain was dark and close that veiled the past, impossible to lift. Better to rest content with the

sunshine on the hither side, than strive to pry into the mysteries that lay beyond.

So the woman, whose grey eyes and ruddy hair had looked out of the mists, vanished again into the vague regions from whence they had been called forth; who can tell, perhaps she slept more quietly, when mother and daughter drove away together through the soft southern springtide.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“ Her speech was such
As not ears, but heart did touch.”

IT was Count Carlos Miramar who told Dolores the story. The girl had pleased him from the first. Several times during the absence of the Countess he came in to talk to her; once he took her for a drive to beguile the long lonely hours. He did not find her dull, as younger men were wont to whisper discreetly to each other. Her long silences he filled with talk of his own past days, amply rewarded by the interest in the gentle shy eyes. He did not even find it difficult to make her talk: easily he drew from her her childish hopes, always touched afresh by the tender unquestioning gratitude and loyalty to those who had been kind to her—that simple devotion which seemed to have no critical faculties developed in the direction of those she loved. To the middle-aged man of the world, there was something refreshing in her simplicity and sweetness. So he told her this new story himself.

“ She shall hear no rumours,” he decided, when

he read Justine's letter, "and she shall know it at once;" but it was with a heavy heart he walked through the bright Roman sunshine to the Casa Julia.

She was at the piano when he entered the room—the sitting-room that had been made pretty and fresh in honour of her—and it was with a smile of welcome she rose to greet him. There were few people in this new life with whom she felt at ease, and this man's evident friendship was very pleasant.

He did not wait, did not even sit down. There was no leading up to the story of that letter he had just received; but at once, in as few words as possible, she knew as much as he did himself. Abrupt, perhaps, but not unkind; for all the time he held her hand in his in a strong kind clasp.

She listened in silence—only when he had finished gave a quick sigh, as if bewildered; and it was a minute before she spoke, and then it was a little hastily, as if fearing her silence might have been misinterpreted.

"I am so very glad she has found her,—it would be so sad if she had not known. But"—she hesitated—"it seems such a pity——" she added, vaguely.

"Never a pity that we found you, Dolores," he said quickly, as if in answer to the unspoken part of her sentence. "I cannot give up one child because we have found another;" and the tears in

Dolores's eyes did not fall—they were dried by the kindness in his voice.

After all, she realised later on, with that gentle trust that was habitual to her, it was only losing something out of an immeasurable gain. The kindness and love could not be recalled; they were part of her life now, and had become inalienably her own.

For a little while that night she looked back with a feeling of regret to the career from which she had been separated, and which had promised provision and comfort for her future, but the regret did not last; it vanished in the confidence that the kindness and love that had been about her so long, would not desert her now, the obedient confidence that she was a child, and that others, older and wiser than herself, would tell her what to do.

The cloud had vanished; as she turned from the window for a good-night look at the photographs, some strong impulse made her sit down then and there, and write one of those letters, composed with such difficulty, to Jem, telling him of this new turn of Fortune's wheel.

As she wrote, she looked often towards where Jerome Shore's kind eyes met her own, occasionally, as if for inspiration, to Jem's square shoulders and grave eyes under the straight brows. "Jerome will hear it soon: I cannot write it to him, it would be so difficult, I should not know what to say; but Jem," with happy confidence, "will understand."

Count Carlos came again and stood by her side on the night when Justine Miramar arrived, always with that little hardly recognised feeling that he would be at hand to see justice done to her, should the necessity arise. But neither did he doubt any longer, if doubt had so long lingered, when into the brilliantly lit drawing-room, Justine entered, the girl's hand in hers.

The tears were all dried now, there was a flush of rich colour on her cheeks, born of excitement, the dark eyes under the delicate arched brows looked into his with that swift call out of the past, that had cried to Justine's heart; that younger brother whose brilliance and beauty he had so delighted in, was once more before him, the soft dark curls falling across the low white forehead in the very fashion he remembered, and withal some vivid reminder in the tall, graceful figure, rounded and beautiful in early womanhood, the proud uplifted head, which brought back Justine Miramar before Sorrow had set his mark on her.

"You are my uncle Carlos?"

Yes, those low eager tones were Juan's,—doubt was killed,—and then she was in his arms, her kiss on his cheeks.

"I know you all,—I love you,—you are not strangers, you are my own."

Yes, he had forgotten, but he remembered again in a moment.

"And here is some one else for you to love."

"Dolores," the girl's eager voice had interrupted, she had freed herself, was hurrying to where the other girl stood a little apart, "I did not forget you, you are my sister."

"But the first kiss is for me," the Countess's voice interposed, "dear Dolores, my other daughter." When Dolores went to bed that night, she gave a little sigh of gratitude as she knelt to say her evening prayers. After all, it had not been painful, they had all been so very kind. "But I knew they would be," she said, softly, "I was quite sure, they are all so good," and she added a few words to the little prim prayer she had learnt at Mrs Traherne's knee, and which further experience with the world had never suggested to her to alter, and then lay down and slept the quiet sleep of irresponsible, trusting childhood.

The old house grew gayer after Marie Adios had passed its great gloomy gates; the very Roman sunshine seemed to intensify, and from that day forth to announce that it was spring. There was the singing of birds, and baskets of flowers without at every street corner, and within everywhere the echo of a blithe gay voice that cheered, and a brilliant girl's beauty that gladdened one to see.

"I can do nothing," she would say, "the good Sisters tried to teach me to hem and stitch like themselves, but I fear they were not pleased altogether."

And yet she could do everything; everything she

touched retained some faint reminder of her individuality. The drawing-room with its beautiful works of art, over which for so long had rested the veil of the past, became suddenly vivid with life.

The slender white hands were never idle, the slim young figure was rarely still, and wherever she went, there remained some visible reminder of her presence. Then so swiftly the song would cease, and kneeling by Justine's side, her curly head against her mother's knee, the ready tears would crowd into her eyes, as she listened to some story of the past, or told some bit out of her own simple life.

"But I have always been quite happy—of course I did not know,"—kissing the hand she held,—“but I was quite happy.” And then almost immediately the talk had drifted elsewhere, and the tears were dried.

When April came and Lent was over, in the rush of gaiety that took place, Marie Miramar stepped forth into the world, and after the one first triumphant night, took the place of universally acknowledged beauty. There were no two opinions, and that which beauty captured, charm held.

"We must be dressed just the same, Dolores and I," she had decided; "we are both dark, the same gowns will suit us both," and with that eager impetuosity that characterised her, she had thought and talked of little else till all was decided as seemed best.

"And you, darling mother? No," shaking her

head, "not black, certainly not. Of course white would suit you, so lovely and so young, but you would not? No,—well, I will not insist, but colour it must be. And it is perfect," she exclaimed, when the night at length came, and she stood by the Countess's side before they started, and looked at the smooth dark head in which there was not a grey hair, the soft flush on the cheek which gave back so much of lost youth, the heavy folds of green velvet which draped so well the tall beautiful figure.

A minute later: "Am I late?" Dolores's soft voice questioned, and then some quick unusual pang checked the question, as she came in sight of the two, mother and daughter looking at each other in that comprehensive love and admiration, which of necessity exiles the outside world.

"Oh, Madre!" the exclamation as if forced from her, "how beautiful!"

She flushed at her own words, and some immediate apologetic expression conveyed to mother and daughter alike that the once familiar word had—unnoticed—fallen into disuse.

"Dolores," the Countess said—she still held Marie's hand, and she took that of Dolores into the same close clasp—"you are not going to try and slip away from me, are you? I cannot afford to lose one daughter, because I have found another;" and the momentary pang was soothed in Dolores's gentle, unrebelling heart.

It was one sustained triumph—with her eyes shin-

ing like stars, and that happy smile about her lovely mouth, and the red flame of excitement burning on her cheeks, the beauty of Marie Adios was beyond doubt or question. She had not dances enough for the eager claimants; young and old were alike charmed by the smiling, girlish beauty, which was not proud or disdainful, and whose sweet eager voice betrayed such strange ignorance of the world, and such delightful interest in all that it held of new. And somehow Dolores was not without the charmed circle, but seemed to stand side by side with the queen who had created it. "She is my sister," Marie said, introducing her partners, bringing her into the conversation when they found themselves together, and in the ready words that never failed her, in some unexplained fashion, making her the sharer of her triumph. And Dolores, to whom so many evenings had been dull, recognised the change, and felt some reflective unaccustomed gaiety, which seemed shed upon her from the gaiety around.

"She is a pretty girl," some man said thoughtfully to Marie, looking across to where Dolores stood talking with unusual animation to Count Carlos, and he said it as if the idea were a new one.

"Pretty! she is lovely," Marie cried, enthusiastically. "I am always looking at her; it seems to me that all the goodness and sweetness and *loveliness* that is in her, is to be seen in her face—and her voice—have you ever heard her sing?"

And after his dance Count Rappini went across

and was presented to Dolores, and talked with her a whole hour about music—and Marie Adios—and went home quite satisfied that she was right, and Dolores was very nearly, if not quite, lovely!

“You forgot your necklace, Marie,” the Countess said, when late that night the girl stole into her room to wish her good night.

“Did you miss it? did you mind? I am so sorry, but I thought—— It was better, was it not, that we should be quite alike, sisters always are; and we did look nice, did we not, beautiful mother?” with a caressing, coaxing movement, throwing her two bare arms round her mother’s neck.

Some sudden, unusual emotion found expression in a sob, but she checked it. Justine never cried, she disdained emotion. “You are not displeased?” the girl questioned a little wonderingly, drawing back her head and looking into her mother’s eyes, “I did not mean that.”

“No, no,” the woman interposed. “You were quite right, quite right. It was I who was careless not to think of it. We must never make any difference: it is our duty, but so mercifully, our happiness also, to make it up to her in every way.”

“No, no, mother.” The girl shook her head. How like she was to the eager, dark-pictured face looking down on her from the wall, the red cap set on his curls! “No, no; the *love* makes up, nothing else could.”

Yes, that was Marie's charm; the quick, passionate, demonstrative love, so foreign and difficult to the northern woman, the love which went forth, and met and gladdened all who came under its spell, which saw with others' eyes, and felt with others' hearts, and which knew no calculation, or fear in its expenditure.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“ Like to some unskilful duellist,
Who having overreached himself, pushing too hard
His foe, or but a moment off his guard,
What odds, when Fate is one’s antagonist ! ”

THE spring was finding its way too into Ingelheim, more cautiously, more coyly, than in the Italian capital. One day appearing in a warm flush of apple-blossom, then drawing back and hiding out of sight for days together, whilst east winds raged, or cold north winds changed soft showers into sleet.

But at last even Spring’s fears seemed set at rest ; under the guise of April’s smiles and tears, she was gladdening all the world around, and it was nearly a year since Jerome Shore had hurried out to meet Dolores, and they had taken shelter from the thunderstorm in the cave, that had heard his love-story.

He was thinking of that fact as he stood at the window of the room of a small hotel which served as messroom for the regiment to which he belonged ; in his hand he held two letters which the post had just brought, and reading them had recalled the fact

which the soft warm May day, with its blue cloud-flecked sky, was indorsing.

"Yes, it was on just such a day as this——" He took up the letter he had last read, and drew it again from its envelope.

His usually kind eyes were clouded and angry, and when he had re-read every word through, down to the signature, he tore it angrily across, and then, remembering his whereabouts, stopped and gathered up the pieces, and thrust them once more back into their cover.

"My dear Jerome."

To one line, one word, as his Excellency affirmed, of Virginia's writing he would always swear. "Unsigned—in print, Miss Shore, your letters would betray you! Don't fancy yourself safe under any disguise."

"Only my letters, Excellency," Virginia had retorted; "don't deprive me of my triumphs in other directions."

"Yes, I withdraw; but in your letters you stand revealed."

"You think so, Excellency; or, perhaps, only revealed as I wish to appear?"

"MY DEAR JEROME,—I am glad you are coming; everything is so changed through the child's death, that it is absolutely necessary to make fresh arrangements for the future. These, of course, require consideration, and I would rather see you than write.

“ I have just had a note from Dolly, saying the Countess is bringing her to hear the Desprez performance.

“ ‘ Poor dear Emilie’s wish—and *I*—what pleasure in life remains to me, but to gratify her whims!’ You can fancy the solo and chorus, with which one is assailed in every highway and by-way! Doubtless Dolly has written all this to you as well, and I suppose it is at her suggestion that you are coming here ?

“ I have stood aloof and proffered no unwelcome advice at any moment of your career,—if I have, forgive me, as it has been quite unintentional,—but as we have been friends always, you won’t mind my now saying with a large R—Reflect.

“ People, I have always contended, should be allowed to choose their own comfort (or discomfort, which is far more popular). But the way into matrimony, I may remind you, is easy, and the way out exceeding difficult. I have never avoided looking facts in the face ; and for the last two months I have busily been doing so, and the result is, that there is little doubt our prospects have not changed for the better.

“ Big people, even when only moderately big, when they suffer reverses of fortune, generally manage not to suffer them alone ! You, at any rate, hold a nominal position, and can continue, if you so approve, to draw a small income as a soldier ; with the addition, probably, under the new *régime*, as

under the old, of employment about the Court, on account of antecedents, &c. *I* do not think a wife advantageous under such circumstances; but again, let me add, I speak as *I*—not as *You*. My own position is quite different.

“I hold a merely unofficial position as lady-in-waiting and general amusement provider to a special lady who has become Nothing or Nobody,—rather, who has dropped into the position of a dowager, with an annuity,—and I drop with her, without the annuity!

“I have saved nothing—how could I? My salary paid for my dress, and I have £200 a-year my father left me, *et me voilà*.

“The Princess is still in despair—can think of nothing but her loss. She never was a woman to face things, and act on her judgment, but knowing her as well as I do, I can guess the end.

“She will, I suppose, eventually marry Prince Adelbert, and so regain all that is regainable. She is too ambitious and proud ever voluntarily to sink into a second position, when a first is obtainable. Understand, I am speaking *ex cathedrâ*; we never speak to each other of the future, only of the past, when together, as we constantly are—which proves, I think, that we are both thinking of the future?

“And so I come to the point that in this matter I also am following my betters.

“But before I go on, let me preface it by saying, follow what I *say*, not what I *do*. Never speak of

what you mean to do, while a doubt still remains—that is my precept—for the good reason that your words are always remembered by some inconvenient listener; my practice is to make an exception in your favour, and tell you that a doubt still remains. I will not mention names under those circumstances, but you will understand. The doubt is caused by the fact that has always been impressed upon me, that exits are so much more difficult than entrances. You must have noticed that also—even on the French stage? Send me a line when to expect you, if you can; do come soon, I really want you. The Princess goes to Venice in a short time, probably I shall accompany her, what else better is there for me to do? Well, good-bye. I wish I could be with you when you receive this, to thrust upon you a correct translation.—Your affectionate sister,

“VIRGINIA.”

“I do not need any translation.” That unusual hardness in the grey eyes brought out the resemblance he bore to his sister, and which the different expression so often hid,—“I know the language.”

The other envelope contained only a few lines from Dolores. Somehow she had drifted back into addressing him as “Captain Shore.” Absence and time had perhaps effected this, and he had grown accustomed to it; perhaps also other important things had prevented him of late from attaching much importance to it, but it was a relief, however,

to read her little letter, stiff and conventional as it was.

The hard look had left his eyes when he put it away, and the only thought that remained was to write to Virginia, and do combat, while the doubt was still there, as an ally.

But his pen did not find much to say, even from such a full heart.

It seemed absurd, but he could think of no counterbalancing future to urge. Nothing to which he could appeal which might be lost by a premature decision. With all the real unhappiness mingled with anger that beset him, he could still think of nothing better to say than to echo her own words, "exits are harder than entrances, and such an entrance will deprive you of independence," yes, that was the only characteristic to which he felt it worth while appealing.

Philosophy is a great help in daily life; that wise, calm philosophy, which teaches us to make the best of the inevitable, for it makes an enormous difference even in final results, if we accustom ourselves to look at the advantage of *this*, keeping our eyes as much as possible from straying towards *that*. Still, it is annoying to realise that there is no wish which that wise philosophy cannot vouchsafe — no warm human heart struggling passionately against the wisdom of its decrees.

It was a relief to Jerome Shore when that letter was posted, and he had fairly started on his journey

to Rome. And yet, with that readiness to be acted on by immediate impressions, the journey itself, to which he had looked forward, and the meeting with Dolores, were pushed out of sight, by the shadow that letter of Virginia's had cast. "I knew it all along," he said, whilst his unseeing eyes were never turned from the country, lovely in its fresh spring beauty. "I knew it—I know it will come." And yet, though he said he knew it—had known it—it angered him to recognise that Virginia and that other woman whose cold hardness he had despised—or laughed at—were to be compared. And that could never be avoided now. Outsiders would freely talk over, and compare the two, and scoff—or agree—as their various natures suggested. And the applause would far and away drown the disapproving hisses.

It was still of Virginia's future he was thinking when he stood in the afternoon sunshine at the door of the Roman palace. Arrived by an earlier train than he had said, he was unexpected. He had loitered at his hotel, and then, wearied with his own thoughts, to which no reply was possible, and from which there seemed no escape, in an effort after change of scene, he had started and walked slowly in the direction of Casa Julia. But even the walk and the approaching meeting were not sufficient to turn the current of his thoughts. It was of Virginia, still of Virginia, he was thinking, when the door was opened.

"The Countess was out, but would shortly be back. Captain Shore was expected to dinner."

Yes, he had come intending to remain to dinner, but he had caught an earlier train, and had come now in the hope of finding the ladies in. "The young ladies are at home," the man volunteered. "Miss Dolores is in the library."

That decided Jerome; he was tired of his own thoughts, and the thought of Dolores's nearness brought back with a warm rush the idea of seeing her, which late cares had pushed aside.

"Show me the way to the library," he said. "I will go to her."

The butler, who was English, and unaccustomed to, not to say disapproving of, foreign habits, quite agreed; it was in his unoffered opinion quite the correct thing to do.

He showed the way, and then having pointed out the door, discreetly retired. It was the same room in which Sister Agnes had stood before Justine Miramar and told her story, but the warm rich afternoon glow was not flooding the room now as then. There was a tall screen close to the door, and when Captain Shore took a step and found himself on the farther side, it was to discover that his entrance had not attracted the attention of the only inmate. The room was semi-darkened, or seemed so; all these rooms were gloomy when not influenced by sunshine. The venetian blinds had been drawn down probably some hours previously,

and now intensified the gloom which the dark oak-panelling and books added to.

But the butler was right, the room was not unoccupied, a heavy leather chair was drawn up in front of the hearth, on which a dimly lighted log spluttered and crackled, effectually drowning any other sound. On the floor lay a pair of gloves, a book, and a few bright flowers—geraniums—which showed bright out of the gloom, and on a footstool, two small crossed feet in very pretty slippers attracted his notice.

There was a smile of amusement under the fair moustache, as with no warning sound or word he suddenly knelt down by the high arms of the old-fashioned chair, and leant forward to where the soft rounded cheek was pillowed on a scarlet cushion; then he had started back with a low exclamation, and a girl with soft dark curls was gazing at him, vague wonder in her eyes, whilst "I was asleep," the musical voice said, and the crimson flush still burnt on the cheek nearest him in evidence of the fact. It was a second or two before he recognised his own position, and rose to his feet.

"I am Jerome Shore," he said then.

"Yes, yes, of course," she interrupted; "it was stupid of me to go to sleep,—we were expecting you,"—and then only it seemed to force itself upon her memory, the attitude in which she had first seen him. "You thought I was Dolores?" she questioned.

"I did," he said apologetically, his wits were returning. "You must forgive me, and not count such an unpropitious beginning against me."

"No, I shall not do that." She was also recovering from the surprise of that awakening under the touch of his hand, the consciousness of his presence. "Dolores is my dearest friend, and you are her friend——"

"I am more than her friend," he said, in a sudden, decided tone that surprised himself.

"Yes, I know, I know," and as she spoke she was taking from his hand the flowers and other trifles which had slipped to the ground whilst she slept; but she was not quite her usual alert self, some shadow of those stolen slumbers, and that abrupt awakening hung about her even whilst she spoke and moved.

"Wait here," she said. "I will send Dolores, and you can talk—oh, for a long time!"

And Jerome waited, as she said, in the quiet darkened room, where the light from the burning log lit up the scarlet cushion in the oak chair, the cushion which still held the impression of a rounded cheek; he could still see—as he had seen in that one startled moment—the long lashes on the flushed cheeks, and then the vague wonder in the eyes, the lifted head, and loose soft curls about the white forehead. It was all so real, so present, and yet so unreal; with daylight surely it would fade, as other dreams had done, into nothingness.

This was the reality. Dolly's slim young figure, Dolly's tender sweet eyes, Dolly's hand holding his, and then his arm round her, and his kisses on her cheek. "Dear Dolly, did you hear what I did?" The dream had quite vanished now. "Did you hear how I stole in here, like a thief to surprise you, and—surprised the wrong person?"

"Yes." Dolores smiled her childish, amused smile. "Marie told me that you thought it was I. I suppose the room was dark?" lifting inquiring eyes around, "because we are not a bit alike," and she laughed. "Marie is beautiful."

He put his finger under her chin, and lifted her face to his, and kissed her again, but he did not say anything, made no comment on her words; that kiss perhaps was the answer to some unspoken question, for his next words were light and cheerful.

"It served me right, Dolly, I suppose,"—and he gave a sigh,—“for thinking with pleasure of stealing up behind you, and frightening you out of your wits, which was my kindly intention. Well, at any rate it was frustrated!"

Jerome's presence in the house, as was always the case wherever he went, seemed welcome to every one. The cheerful, lively dinner over, it was Marie who proposed that Dolores should show him the pictures in the drawing-room above; the unused drawing-room, only ready for state occasions, before joining her mother and herself in the library, where they sat in the evening when alone.

"They must have a great deal to say," she whispered to Justine, "and they can begin it there."

"He is a very agreeable man?" the Countess said. There was a question in her voice, in the eyes turned on Marie.

"And he looks so good, mother," the girl replied. "I like his eyes so much," and then, very shortly after, the other two joined them.

There was a little fear on Jerome's part of doing what was not customary, and when Dolores had asked the few questions that occurred to her, she was quite content to return to where the others awaited them.

Hero-worship had not been killed, as is so sadly often the case, by the closer approach of the worshipped. It was still a joy to sit on a low stool by the fire, and listen to Jerome Shore's amusing talk, as on those far-off days in Virginia's drawing-room, and to meet now and then the tender affection in his kind eyes. It sufficed still—words were not many, but her silence was eloquent of happiness, and Jerome Shore was well aware of the fact.

Virginia and her future,—and her carefully worded warning, the capital R, symbolic of Reflect, had vanished from his memory, when that happy evening drew to an end. His was not an analytical mind; he did not criticise as he walked home to his hotel under the starlit sky, he only felt that he had escaped the atmosphere of care and worry and coming trouble which he had been living in of late,

and had entered into another world, where he breathed fresher, purer air. It was returning to his child-love, he was assured of that.

And Virginia was wrong; poverty was so terrifying to her, ambition so necessary,—that she lost a just balance when weighing the two, and feared, where there was nothing to fear. He knew best what he wanted,—had he not proved it,—as if some doubting voice had spoken in the silent street.

But doubt never spoke again, perhaps there was no spare moment in those days that followed for it to raise its voice. It was the last fortnight of the season, and filled with engagements.

“Never, never,” Dolores would say, as night after night their little party entered the brilliant rooms, “would this time be erased from her memory.” She could not speak of it; even now it was to Count Carlos and his peers words came easiest, but those happy evenings would never be forgotten. The happiness was visible too—the Countess saw it and smiled in approval.

“Dear Dolores,” she said to Jerome, “she is growing prettier and prettier; it is all your doing. There never was a dearer child, so true, so affectionate, and so happy. Yes, that was for all the world to see, and, after all, was it surprising, kindness and love all about her, and Jerome’s tender care always near. No solitary moments now. At first he had divided his dances, shared his evenings chiefly between the two girls.

"You must be charitable," he said, "and be kind to me; I don't like strangers, and, besides, my Italian is feeble," but gradually somehow that had ceased.

Now when he was not dancing a duty dance, or escorting some dowager into supper, he stood by the Countess's side, awaiting Dolores's return with her partner. Perhaps her happy shy smile rewarded his idle waitings, and he was always content talking to Justine.

And another little habit had fallen into disuse; the bouquet of white violets Dolores carried had no fellow now, as had been the case at first; that difference had been begun when Dolores first appeared wearing a sparkling diamond ring on her slim young hand, one day at dinner.

"You never gave Marie one dance," she had said one evening as they all loitered in the library, discussing a ball, and commenting on each other's cards. Marie had raised a laugh by showing Dolores's with its one name written right across the programme in lordly style, and then Dolores had made her little comment.

"There was no use expecting such luck," Jerome answered, but he did not look round from the fireplace where he was standing. "I preferred dignified silence to a refusal."

"And why did you expect a refusal," Marie retorted, quickly. "That is a very unjust accusation, and it is very cowardly," she added, immediately, "to avoid things for fear of failure. Is it not, mother?"

"I am too sleepy to think," the Countess replied. "Come, girls, it is very late——"

"It is better to be cowardly," began Jerome, turning round towards where Marie was standing by Dolores's side, the incarnation of untired youth and beauty.

"No, it is not," she interrupted; "it is better to be anything than cowardly!"

There was no time for an answer, if he had one ready, he had said good night,—with her last words the door had closed, and he was left alone.

But the next evening, when he had seen Dolores and her partner move away together, he deliberately crossed the room to where Marie stood, the centre of a little group, and asked for the waltz, the first notes of which were just sounding.

"I am engaged," she said, "of course," as she laid her hand on his arm, "but I daresay it does not matter."

"And as I have conquered my cowardice," and Jerome laughed, "I deserve to be rewarded."

"Yes, but we will not waste the time in talking; we can do that at home—there is no one here who dances as you do."

He did not return the compliment, perhaps recognised it was not meant as one,—not another word passed till the music ceased, and then his ear caught a quick sigh of keen enjoyment. It was reflected in the brilliant eyes, the flush on the cheeks; she was the embodiment of perfect, innocent enjoyment, the

thought passed through his heart as he noted the slight disorder of the dark curls, the quickened breathing as she spoke. "Of all I have discovered," she said, "since I left the convent, in the way of pleasure I mean, *that* is to me the best. You don't think it wrong, do you?" she asked quickly, a minute later, as there was no reply.

"Wrong?" he repeated, "my dear child, no, no. My sister," he went on directly after, in a calmer tone, "is always telling me that to feel the present, to occupy one's self fully with it, is the talent of living. And she is astoundingly clever, as I daresay Dolly has told you, and her theories of life are, when not her own, procured from cleverer people than herself, so you can imagine how valuable they are."

"Yes;" Marie's voice betrayed a doubt, "it sounds very clever, but don't you think that there are two sides to it?"

"There generally are." Jerome's voice was unusually hard, it carried an echo of Virginia's. "The more you enjoy, the heavier the proportionate price."

He was going to add something further perhaps, the echo of Virginia's voice had brought some of Virginia's mocking theories into his heart, but just as he was about to speak, the frank beautiful eyes met his own, puzzled a little at his words, and they banished the momentary bitterness.

"But this is not the place or hour for philosophy,"

he said instead ; “ do you see that ugly young woman who is keeping one eye on me, over there in that green gown ? Well, I am going to dance this with her. I had meant to hide, but now I have repented, and am going to do my duty—so good-bye.”

“ It is very kind of you,” Marie replied, “ for it must be so dull to go to a dance and not enjoy yourself—but you *are* kind.”

“ I am. Even if cowardly, I am kind ! To quote my sister again, the world is divided into two classes,—those whose first instinct is to say ‘ Yes,’—and the others. She is always telling me I belong to the first, and that that is the reason why I am so easy to live with.”

Marie laughed. “ Good-bye again,” he said, and then turned back to add, “ and if you knew how I hate green ! ”

It was just the Jerome Shore of old, but of late he had not been quite the same. There had been growing some faint indescribable difference. A few evenings later brought what, as far as the Miramars were concerned, was the most important, as well as the last event of the season.

This was a ball in the Casa Julia. That over, they were all going to Ingelheim, to be present, according to Dolores’s wish, at the representation of poor Antoine Lütz’s music. After that, the Countess’s plans were undecided. She talked of going to England, but that was vague talk, with so much in the immediate future to interest them. In this matter .

of the ball, Jerome was of great use. Marie's brilliant ideas found ready accomplishment in his willing help and strength.

Dolores watched the transformation, those clever brains and hands effected, with wonder. Everything Marie touched seemed to fall under the spell of her artistic talent, and mingled therewith, was that other talent, which enabled her to foresee and provide against future necessities.

Dolores was the possessor of no such gifts; she took a few flowers out of every bouquet Jerome gave her and kept them for the succeeding day in a queer Toby jug the little Prince had once given her, and in her room, which was always so perfectly neat, these and the photographs, and two or three books that had been given her, formed the only ornaments. Everything else was a part of the room, not owing its presence to her. Whereas Marie's room was the despair of her maid. "I cannot help it, mother dear," she would say, "I never had anything before, and now of course I don't know how to keep things in their places." And yet the very disorder that always reigned was artistic, and not altogether displeasing to the eye. The many bowls of flowers, each one always a little study in colour and effect.

The mandolin here, and piles of music on one table, and open books everywhere, pencil-sketches lying about, chiefly caricatures,—she had a clever touch with her pencil, and was taking lessons now

in water-colours,—a canary singing loudly in the sunshine.

“It is very odd, I am sure,” she once said, “but I don’t mind noise, I think I like it;” so the canary sang on unrebuked, whilst she came and went, for though each girl had her own sitting-room, Marie Adios was very seldom in hers!

“I don’t like being alone, Dolores, mother is busy, —no, go on practising, I love your voice. How good and industrious you are;” and like some bright-plumaged tropical bird, she would enter Dolores’s neat, carefully ordered room. Light and colour and sound seemed essentials, they were life, and she seemed to absorb some of the brilliance and colour from the surroundings in which she delighted. She would stand at a street corner, flushed with excitement, as a regiment marched past to the sound of martial music, unheeding of the admiring looks she attracted.

“Fancy, I might have died, and never have seen or heard all this,” she said once to Jerome, “whereas now——”

“Oh, you have a great deal more to learn,” he answered, smiling down at the beautiful excited face.

“Yes, yes, I daresay, but I have had a great deal, enough at any rate to find out what a beautiful happy place the world is!”

“Poor child,” was the reflective thought in Jerome’s kind heart; “but after all,” defying the thought, “why not? With such a happy nature,

why should not the world prove a happy abiding-place!" That happy nature seemed to affect all with whom it came in contact, it was the tender kindness which never wished to shine at the expense of others; it was as if the glow from that warm heart threw its rich light on all around. Her brilliant beauty did not eclipse Dolores's less noticeable grace and charm; it was, on the contrary, as if a reflective warmth and colour embraced and enriched Dolores, adding to her charm.

"It is unselfishness," her mother thought, seeing the result; but if it were, it was not self-denying unselfishness, it was love freely and royally bestowed, which blessed and rejoiced the giver as well as the receiver.

On the evening of the ball the appearance of the rooms certainly rewarded the workers.

"I am filled with pride," Jerome told Dolores, as he took her away towards the conservatory, "and yet I only did what I was told."

"It is beautiful." Dolores paused a moment with her companion to look back down the long length of the room, all white and gold in its decorations, and now further embellished with white and yellow blossoms. Tall yellow lilies in corners, bowls of yellow roses everywhere, wreaths of yellow jasmine above white-curtained doors and windows.

The two girls, as usual, were dressed exactly alike, and according to Marie's suggestion they carried out

the scheme of colour, and were all in white, except for the wreath of jellow jasmine that crowned Dolores's smooth small head, and whose star-like blossoms showed among Marie's soft curls, and the bouquet she carried of yellow roses and jasmine.

Jerome was pleased, and said so; his eyes were soon turned from the room to his little companion; it pleased him, as it always had done, to note the smile that responded to his flattering words.

"She is a dear child," he said often, of late oftener than ever, perhaps the consciousness of Virginia's warning note was not altogether forgotten, though he ignored it as much as possible.

"We must not sit here," Dolores observed regretfully in a minute or two, "we must help the others to look after the guests; don't you think so?" as for a moment her companion made no reply.

"Yes, Dolly, you are right, but you must keep one dance for me, which shall it be? Or two," he added, insinuatingly, "because think of all the duty I shall be obliged to do, and every one knows how exhausting duty is."

"Well, two," Dolores relented, "and one for Marie. She will be disappointed if you don't."

She lifted her clear eyes to his as she spoke, and something in them seemed to prompt his next words. "No, Dolly, I will not be domineered over; if I am to be allowed three pleasure dances, they shall all be with you, and that," touching her forehead with his lips, "seals the bargain."

"You little coward," taking her hand in his, as he noted the frightened look she cast round. "No; there is no one there—you need not be frightened!"

But when he gave her back her card as they made their way through the fast filling room, he showed her his name written on the three spaces. "And dare to throw me over," he said, lowering his voice, "then live in dread of your punishment. I shall kiss you directly I find you, wherever you may be."

"Oh, hush!" Dolores's voice exclaimed in an agony of fear, which was checked by a nervous laugh, as she looked anxiously around to be sure no one had heard.

Jerome meanwhile walked away to where the Countess stood receiving her friends, and was soon, as he had foretold, busied in the task of introducing partnerless girls, or dancing with them himself. His first dance with Dolores was not till late; he had hoped by that time every one would be happy, and his duties accomplished; but somehow every one seemed to be enjoying themselves irrespective of him, very shortly, and when No. 8 sounded, he found himself in the conservatory alone, the girl to whom he had been talking vanishing with Count Rappini towards where the distant valse notes sounded.

It was a warm night, the windows were open all round; he walked towards one, and looked down into

the street. A little group was assembled below, attracted by the lights. Now and again a black shadow detached itself, and walked away, singing the refrain of the valse that was sounding overhead.

Strange! for the moment he had quite a forlorn feeling, as if by some unexplained accident he had stepped outside the world of happy people, and was contemplating their content from the outside. "It is the knowledge—the fear," he amended, "of what Virginia is going to do. I wish she would write. Well, I shall see her soon, and know all there is to know."

So thinking he turned back towards the ball-room,—after all, this was an inappropriate moment for indulging in uncomfortable reflections,—and was startled, as he paused in the doorway, by Marie's voice.

"Not dancing, Captain Shore?" She had never dropped the formal prefix, though he had always called her by her name. "How lazy, I was going to say, but I mean how fortunate, I have no partner either."

At the voice, the words, there was a quick pulsation of his heart, at which the colour flew up into his cheeks, and he was aware of a momentary unqualified, but unexplained thrill of joy. And then there was a loud, discordant clash; the music had ceased, and Marie was saying, "Oh, how disappointing, it is over! you were just too late!" And he was making some vague, conventional remark, and

turning away towards where Dolores stood awaiting him.

But all through those dances with her, he was not quite his usual self; something was lying in wait he knew, something that Dolores's gentle, confiding trust did not entirely banish. He, so little prone to excitement, was excited now, and it was no reflective emotion such as was most habitual to him, but one that owed life and strength to himself.

It was quite late, the rooms were visibly thinning; Dolores was no longer by his side, but had disappeared for the moment, when, lifting his eyes, and looking across the rapidly clearing room, he met those of Marie Adios turned towards him, something of anxiety in their expression.

In a second it had vanished—had it ever been there?—and she was talking again to the man by her side.

Quickly, so quickly that there was no time for thought, Jerome Shore had crossed the intervening space, as if, so it seemed to him, in answer to a call, and was standing by her.

"This is our dance." His voice was low but commanding; there was unveiled eagerness in his grey eyes. "Come, do not let us waste any of it."

He was aware of her faltering some words of excuse to him to whom she had been speaking, but he did not heed them, he only knew that she obeyed him, and that by his promptitude he had won his valse.

"It was not my dance," he said, in a somewhat defying tone, pausing a moment later. "I hope you are not annoyed?"

"No, I am glad," she answered,—"I was rather afraid," lifting her eyes to his, "that I had vexed you, annoyed you somehow."

"What made you think that?" They were dancing again, the words were very low.

"I could not explain, at least it would be difficult, because," and she laughed, "it is not one large thing, but a great many small ones, as if you had tried to avoid me for one; and as I had not meant to offend you——" She stopped, ending her sentence with a question, "But I was mistaken?"

"Quite mistaken." He echoed the words, that was all, and then let silence slip between them again. Only the soft dreamy notes of the valse, the all-pervading scent of jasmine flowers. Under its influence it seemed to Jerome as if he were losing all sense of reality; he was no longer outside the world, but in the very centre of its giddiest whirl, and his senses were hushed to semi-slumber. The thrill of excitement with which he had commenced had given place to one of dreadful calm, in which he was conscious of nothing beyond the moment. Past and future had vanished; the present stood alone. It came to an end, because the music ceased, and these echoes which sounded in his ears as he paced down the dark side of the moonlit street were but echoes, this scent of jasmine on

the warm night air was no more real than the dark beautiful eyes which still haunted him, looking into his, faintly troubled, under their arched brows.

“Beautiful as a dream,” he thought, conscious that he was waking, and looked up to the silvered sky above, and then quickly downward at a touch on his arm, a voice in his ear, “Jerome.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Tis we,
 And not the world, are new ;
 Our cry for bliss, our plea,
 Others have urged it too—
 Our wants have all been felt, our errors made before."

"DORISLAUS!" Though there was a doubt, a question in the cry, there was neither in Jerome Shore's heart. It was Dorislaus Lescynski standing there in the moonlit street, the fine-cut, unsmiling face of old, the same look of one doing battle with fate, that he had known and loved so long.

All the mists that had been closing round thinned and disappeared at the familiar face and voice,—it was a minute before he recollected where he stood, and had remembered to ask whence he came. "I have been waiting for you," he answered, evasively, "I found out you were here, and I have been waiting. Let us go back together."

It was almost in silence they made their way homewards through the empty streets. Jerome asked questions and Dorislaus answered, but not expansively. But then he never was expansive in words.

It was from Jerome all the expressions of happiness came, when at length they stood together in his room.

"You must come, late as it is, and tell me something."

"But you look ill," Jerome began.

"I have been very ill," Dorislaus responded briefly.

"That," nervously, "is why I am here."

At the nervous tone Jerome looked at him, then drew an arm-chair nearer to the hearth, where a log still blazed.

"Sit down," he said, and as Dorislaus obeyed, and yet remained silent, with a gesture of almost boyish affection, Jerome laid his hand on the other's shoulder. "Ah, it is good to see you," he said, and that ring of truth in his voice was unmistakable; it was his sincerity and tenderness that rendered Jerome Shore irresistible to those he loved. Now, standing thus by his friend's side, it was of him alone he was thinking,—his own cares and troubles, his fears for his sister, his own future, were all alike forgotten; and conjured up by the presence of Dorislaus Lescynski, was an entirely fresh set of thoughts and emotions, of which his friend was the centre. It was as if his presence had sufficed to create in Jerome's heart a reflection of the troubles that he was beset with.

"You never were wise," Jerome said at length, and Dorislaus smiled, "but surely to have fever and wounds and all sorts of horrors, and then to spend

half the night walking about in the open air, and the other half talking, shows you are no wiser than you used to be."

"Yes, you are right." Dorislaus had risen, but he lingered, standing with arms crossed, in the attitude that brought back so many other occasions to Jerome's memory. He had talked much of the past—this past year, but not a word of present or future.

"You are in this hotel?" Jerome questioned. "Good, I will come to you in the morning."

"I do not mean to stay here." He had taken a few steps away, and the words were spoken so low that Jerome scarcely caught them. "It was to see you that I came."

Another second's silence, other words seemed following, but instead, "Good night," was all he said, and Jerome was left alone to try and wonder what lay behind that silence, until sleep overpowered him.

Tired and excited as he had been, it was not surprising he slept on late the following day, but as soon as he was dressed and had breakfasted, there was a message from Prince Lescynski, asking to be admitted.

To Jerome it seemed when he saw him that the lamplight of the previous evening had been very deceptive, or he himself very unobservant. He was shocked at his appearance by daylight. He was thin to gauntness; the dark lines under his eyes made them appear sunk and hollow, he almost fancied there was a touch of grey about the temples.

"This will never do," he began, "bad nights and excitement will bring back fever. It was all my fault letting you sit up."

"Oh, never mind my health; yes, I have been ill, *am* ill, if you like." This was more the man he remembered. Jerome felt more at ease with that quick, ill-concealed impatience, than with the quiet visitor of the night before.

"I am such a fool," he began again, "that though I came all the way here to see you, and ask you a question, I left you without asking it."

"And so of course have sat up waiting for me to wake up to ask it now?" Jerome concluded.

He was standing now by his friend's side, his eyes were averted as he added: "Well, ask your question, I am ready to answer it." But it was not quite the one he had expected.

"When are you going to Ingelheim? You are going, I know: I want to go also," he added more calmly, "I want to see his Excellency."

"Well, that is easily managed, is it not? Directly you are fit to travel, I mean," he went on.

"That has nothing to do with it," Dorislaus interrupted, impatiently, "you know it has not. It is easy of course for *you* to go, I want to go with you, I want you to arrange it. I want," he took a few steps to the window and spoke from there, his head averted, "I want to see his Excellency without its being known."

"There is no earthly reason *now*, for secrecy." For

the life of him Jerome could not resist that one swift, bitter sentence. All the past flooding in at the sight of that figure in the window, the sound of those words which brought back so much. But almost before his words had died away—

“A thousand times greater reason than ever,” Dorislaus exclaimed passionately, turning impetuously round, “you must see that.”

For a moment Jerome was silent, then: “I see your point of view,” he answered, briefly.

“I am not strong enough to be independent,” Dorislaus said a moment later, and the passion had died out of his voice. “I want to go with you, so,” smiling and seating himself, “I cannot afford to quarrel with you.”

“When do you want to go?”

“To-day.”

“That is impossible!” And yet, after all, why? It was only fore-dating his departure by one day; it would only mean taking one long, quick journey with his friend, instead of dawdling about *en route* for several days with these other friends. And there were so many reasons for hurry. He wished to see Virginia, if possible, before any decided step had been taken. She had even written that she wished to see him, for many reasons, every reason, it would be best.

Yes, all those many thoughts had hurried through his brain, and but a moment had elapsed. “That is impossible!” his own words were still echoing

through the silent room. Dorislaus's eyes were still turned anxiously towards him.

"You think I am not strong enough for the journey? I am stronger than you think, only tired and worried with want of sleep and anxiety. Jerome," his hand slender and brown suddenly grasped the arm of the chair, and Jerome noted that it trembled, "I want to ask another question."

"Well?" Captain Shore was lighting a cigarette,—he did not move,—could not see his friend's face as he waited for this question.

"You know it, you guess it," Dorislaus said quickly, "you have been there lately; you hear from there; tell me"—there was a second's hesitation—"what there is to tell."

In a moment it seemed as if some dark cloud rose and overshadowed all Jerome Shore's usual kindness, as if bitter words—the truth, of course—was the only way to deal with all the bitternesses of life. As if Virginia's methods were best. Surface dealings were best; they secured you all you needed, all at least that life could offer—but care—give of your best like this man, and this was your reward,—and the cure, of course, was the truth! Learn what return your love might hope for, and any one, every one, would turn and follow wiser people like Virginia, who had discovered and followed a clue that had led out of such labyrinths. "Virginia tells the truth," he said aloud, and he took her letter from a case on the table, and laid the last sheet down on it.

"You can read it; there are no secrets—in such lives there *are* no secrets. The rest of the letter," with vehement unusual disdain, "you might read also for the matter of that,—only that it contains nothing that would interest you."

All the time that Dorislaus read, and it took him some time to read those few lines in Virginia's clear distinct writing, Jerome paced up and down the room; he did not stop when he saw Dorislaus had placed the letter on the table, and had risen also.

But a moment later he was sorry for the wave of useless passion that had overpowered him, that had made him rough when of all times he should have been most tender: such methods were unfamiliar to him at all times, to-day they were sheer cruelty. And Jerome Shore was of all men least capable of cruelty.

"Don't go," he said quickly, laying a detaining hand on the other's arm, interposing himself as he spoke between Dorislaus and the door, towards which the latter's footsteps were bent. "You know Virginia,"—Dorislaus's eyes were on the ground, he did not seem to hear him,—*"she says such things, bitter things to amuse. For yourself you can see that she has no authority,—it is a supposition merely, and his Excellency will know,"* he added, as there was still no comment.

Though he was still silent, Dorislaus clasped his friend's hand as if in acknowledgment of his words; and then, "Yes, I wish to see his Excellency," he

said, slowly, "he has always been my friend,—and you, Jerome," as if fearing any lurking unkindness in the words. "You two," smiling a little, "were the only two who stuck to me in my disgrace."

"Disgrace!" Jerome repeated, hotly. "Well, I will not say what I think, our views are so different. You are bent upon going? Then go and rest, and I will be ready to start when you are."

"This afternoon?"

"As you wish."

But alone, Captain Shore was too much perturbed even to finish his cigarette. He tossed it away, and continued pacing up and down the room.

"Disgrace," he repeated again, and again at the word the angry blood flushed his fair face. "The plaything of a weak, treacherous woman, not even strong enough to bear the result of her own acts, but, the amusement over, takes refuge in angry pride! Mean, treacherous—but they are all alike," bitterly; "self-seeking, false, unworthy of any man's faithful love."

And then the torrent was checked; from out of the mists of surrounding worldliness appeared a girl's face, beautiful and true; frankness and honesty in the lovely haunting smile that floated before his memory now, whilst all around was the faint scent of jasmine flowers. But even as he so paused the vision faded, and Dolly's sweet shy eyes were looking into his, with the sure confidence he knew so well, claiming something, but, ah! giving so much also.

"I am a fool," was his concluding thought, but that is a summary that we often arrive at, and it is more conclusive than helpful. For a minute he lingered, taking out paper and pen, hesitating, wondering whether it would not be easier to write his change of plan; but eventually he forsook that idea, and taking up his hat, walked down to the Casa.

The Countess was out, but the young ladies were in, and the Countess was expected very shortly.

There was scarcely a moment for reflection, and yet Jerome was conscious of reflection before he replied. "Will you ask Miss Dolores to speak to me for a few moments? It is only to leave a message."

He was shown into the library; there was still confusion everywhere, though less here than in the other rooms. But even here there were fading roses on the mantel-shelf, and wreaths of blossoms looking strangely incongruous amongst the severity of oak furniture and innumerable books, and everywhere that all-pervading scent of jasmine flowers. It seemed to haunt him wherever he went.

It appeared to him as if he gave his message very brusquely; there was a nervous consciousness that he was listening for expected disapproving or disappointed words when he had ceased speaking, as if his own disappointment—yes, he was bitterly disappointed—would find an immediate echo.

"Madre will think you have done quite right,"

Dolores's gentle voice answered, "I am sure. Will you not wait and see her? I don't think she will be long."

"No, I cannot wait." He was watching her, but evidently his thoughts were elsewhere, though in a minute, noting her doubt and evident perplexity, he had pushed his own wrong aside.

"But I have time to sit down all the same for about ten minutes. I have come to say good-bye to you, and it will tire us much less if we sit down."

"Will you come to Madre's sitting-room?" Dolores questioned. "It is the only comfortable room in the house to-day."

"Dolly, you are growing difficult, I regret to see! Only comfortable room indeed; what do you call this? And besides, it is to you I have come to say good-bye. You must pass on my treasured last words."

He had seated himself on the arm of the chair on which she sat, and taken her hands in his.

"Well, Dolly, you enjoyed yourself last night, I suppose?"—and as she nodded, "you won't grow proud and tiresome, will you, now that you have found out how important you are?"

She smiled that quick smile that in old days it had pleased him so much to watch for. He put his hand under her chin, and turned her face towards him.

"You dare to laugh! I grieve to say that I think

you are becoming independent and all sorts of things that I don't approve of! Who is teaching you?"

"Marie." She smiled again. "She says that I am not independent enough."

At the answer, for a moment it seemed as if he were going to make some further remark; instead, he suddenly stood up and drew Dolores into his arms, and his tones were no longer playful; there was no longer a smile in his eyes, as he kissed her tenderly.

"I don't want you different," he said. "Don't let anybody try to change you. You could not be improved, in my opinion; and you know I am always right, am I not?" holding her at a little distance, and smiling down at her.

"I am sure you are," she answered, confidently.

"There is another kiss for that, and then one for good-bye. Now, don't get into any mischief, and explain everything to the Countess, won't you? Yes, and say good-bye to them. I am sorry to have no time to say it myself."

"I can call Marie," she began.

"No, I have not time," he answered, quickly, "and, besides, you are the one I want to see. And as you have been so good, you may have the inestimable pleasure of walking to the door with me, and waving your lily hand after me, like black-eyed Susan. I think it would be more cheering than that doleful butler."

"Is Prince Lescynski very ill?" the girl questioned, as side by side they walked through the half-dark passages, into which the sunlight never found its way.

Jerome was conscious that he had slurred over the name a little, that he had dwelt more upon the friend than the friend's name, recalling, as he felt it might, so much that it would be painful to remember. Could he but have read in Dolores's pure untroubled heart, his doubt would have been reproved. He himself had long ago banished the pain and trouble she had known on that score, her trust and confidence in him were as complete as that of a child, who alone recognises the fulness to which forgiveness may attain. Her upright soul had known no shadow from the past since the day that Jerome had first kissed her tears away.

There are such natures even in this troublesome world; natures which grow up and carry on into maturity that sweet unanxious beauty that graced their childhood. It is almost a subject for envy to see some possess what others must purchase at such a costly price, or perhaps never acquire at all. But it may be that those whose serene faith we admire, whose calm beauty we envy, are placed, as are beautiful flowers in a dark forest, to charm and delight us to whom other uses are given; that the terrible shocks and doubts that assail some lives were not needed to give them their perfection. The lily's whiteness is gained without the experience of the

storm and passion that wrought the perfect splendour of the oak.

The name of Dorislaus Lescynski scarce brought more than the memory of Jerome's kindness and a faintly stirred memory of the Prince himself, silent and courteous, and overshadowed with unexplained trouble.

"Yes, he is very ill," Jerome answered, while the doubt came and went under Dolores's steadfast eyes, "so ill, that I do not like to leave him to make this journey alone, though I am horribly disappointed."

"How long will you be?"

"A week."

Dolores sighed. She too was disappointed, but there is something in early training which is never quite banished by after-life. Perhaps it is as good a shield as any against the blows of fortune, to recognise from the nursery that disappointments are the lot of man, and are to be received as such, and not rebelled against.

The Trahernes had been old-fashioned in their government. So-and-so was the command, obedience was the duty of the children, the reason rested with the elders, and Dolores had not even yet stepped far enough beyond such tutelage as to question the decree of those in authority, or even to doubt the wisdom of their decision. In this she was fortunate that she did not look back to a government of caprice; no, this had been given, or that taken away,

but behind the fact was the belief which can only be founded in knowledge, that necessity obliged, even though the knowledge of the necessity rested with the higher powers, not that the joy or sorrow was dealt out by the will of some capricious being invested with tremendous powers.

"It is disappointing," Dolores said: her hand was on his coat-sleeve, he stroked it as he answered—

"Good Dolly. Well, it is only for a week, and then I shall see you again, and then"—he paused a second—"then we are going to settle all sorts of things. I am not going to have any more education, and all that rubbish! You can dance now, and that is all I ever asked, was it not? I cannot have you taught more than *I* know," and he shook his head.

Dolores reddened a little, perhaps at the possibility his words contained.

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"Just what I say," stooping his head and speaking in a lower tone. "You have learnt quite enough now, I am not going to wait any longer. Why," smiling, "you speak Italian better than I do already! There, think all that over during next week, and now give me a kiss," stooping down towards her in the dim light, and taking her in his arms. "No, there is no use blushing, and saying you have said good-bye; I am going to have a kiss, although I am quite sure the butler is watching through the glass door!

Good-bye, dear child," he turned back from the doorway to say. "You need not be frightened," as the glare of intruding sunlight revealed Dolores's reddened cheeks and uneasy eyes, "I daresay it was not the butler, but just a ghost, or something equally unimportant."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

“Sad would the salt waves be,
 And cold the singing sea,
 And dark the gulfs that echo to the seven-stringed lyre
 If things were what they seem,
 If life had no fair dream,
 No mirage made to tip the dull sea-line with fire.”

THERE was no doubt about the advent of spring ; even in Ingelheim all previous anxiety was set at rest on the subject, as Captain Shore drove the night following that of his arrival through the well-known streets. It was close on eight o'clock, but the air was still warm, and full of the scent of lilac bloom.

He was on his way to the palace in answer to a note from Virginia, but on the way he had told the driver to stop at his Excellency's door.

There were so many changes in everything and every one that he feared he might be told he was away, but no, his Excellency was at home, and doubtless, the servant added, glancing at Jerome's uniform, would see him.

“Give him my card, and ask if he will speak to me for a few minutes,” and almost immediately the

man returned with permission to enter. "Captain Shore."

The old man looked older, Jerome thought, even in this short interval, but the eyes were keen and observant as ever that met his. "I did not know you had returned."

"Only last night, Excellency. You will excuse a visit at such an hour, but I wished to be sure of finding you, and if possible alone."

"You are welcome. Sit down. Somehow," he smiled, "it is difficult to associate Captain Shore with business."

Jerome obeyed the invitation and seated himself, but his companion noted he did not make any reply to his smile or words.

"My days here are numbered," he went on, for the sake of something to say, "as, of course, you know. Like the Princess, I now retire into private life."

"Are you going to leave Ingelheim?"

"Yes. I hesitated some time whether I should try my hand at growing cabbages in the country, but I have decided I am too old, so I am going to Paris instead."

"And the Princess?" Jerome questioned. "She is still here, I am told."

"Yes, she has returned, but only, I believe, to stay a short time. She will be glad to go. It is human nature not to care to see one's place occupied."

"Yes," Jerome answered, absently. "*Your* place,"

he added, directly, "will never be filled. I cannot even imagine Ingelheim without you."

One quick look his Excellency gave Jerome's bent head. "Something was wrong, what had brought him? What was it he had such difficulty in finding words for? Was that last sentence a clue? had he heard the rumours which were rife everywhere? Did he know——?"

His thoughts were checked, Jerome was speaking again, "Excellency, I am not much of a diplomatist——"

"One in a family suffices," his Excellency interpolated, as he paused again.

Jerome smiled. "Yes, Excellency, I am not going to try and share Virginia's laurels. I have come here to-night to tell you something, and I cannot manage it in the easy manner I hoped, though there is no earthly reason why I should not. Dorislaus Lescynski is here, and wishes to know if you will see him."

There was a defiant tone in his voice, of that he was angrily aware, directly he had spoken.

He stood up in the silence that followed, angry with himself that he felt apologetic, had spoken defiantly, when after all neither was called for. "I have given my message, Excellency." There was a hard look in his grey eyes. "I do not attempt to justify or excuse it. I can see no cause or reason for either course. He would not come to you without knowing if you were willing to receive him,

and I offered to ask you. You will consider"—he paused, unaware, till he heard the sarcastic stress on the word, how angry he was—"and let me know your decision."

He had taken a step towards the door before the old man's voice arrested him.

"Jerome—wait." It sounded moved and trembling: he paused. "Wait, do not hurry away. I can settle about his visit now. Where is he? Can he come to-night?"

"No," the little puff of passion was dispersed by those anxious words, and Captain Shore turned back to find his companion standing up, hurrying towards him. "No, he is at 'The Three Crowns'—he is ill."

"Ill," his Excellency repeated.

"Yes; he has had fever, and worry; and long journeying, I suppose, has not improved it; he had a touch when we arrived, and has not yet been out. Besides, Excellency," the momentary anger was gone, it was Jerome's usual kind look that met the old man's perturbed glances, "he is awaiting your answer before he appears. He always was rather insane, as you know," he added, a minute later.

"And is still, I suppose." The agitation had died away; this was the keen calm old man Jerome had known so long.

"And is still," he repeated, pacing up and down the room as he spoke. "It was to humour a sick

man's fancy I came to you to-night, not at all to please myself. There is frankness at any rate."

"Captain Shore's common-sense would have suggested that an afternoon call is the usual way in which returned travellers announce their arrival."

"Common-sense suggests," Jerome retorted, "that it is a less feverish way of seeing your friends to call in the afternoon than the evening."

"Tell him I shall be here and alone to-morrow night at this hour," his Excellency answered.

"No one is to know he has been here," the words were quickly spoken. Captain Shore had paused in his walk, but his eyes were on the ground.

"No one shall know," his Excellency answered, gravely.

"It is a folly." Jerome's eyes were smiling again, as if relieved at having said the words; and he spoke now in his usual, somewhat slow tones, "But I look on it as unavoidable folly, probably a hereditary instinct,—he was born a conspirator."

"The voice is the voice of Jerome," his Excellency observed, tranquilly, "but the words are those of Virginia."

"Excellency," Jerome said, unheeding the observation, lifting eyes grown a little anxious, "you will advise well—wisely—will you not?"

"In your opinion," the other retorted, "do you think good wise advice is profitably bestowed on young men?"

"He says," Jerome went on, "that you were once

his friend. He tells me little, so I know very little; he may have, in your opinion, forfeited that friendship."

He paused. The keen eyes seemed compelling him to continue, "But however that may be, he trusts you, and values your opinion; you will, I am sure, let no old follies harden your heart to him now."

"He has at any rate *one* friend still," his Excellency said, taking Captain Shore's hand.

"Oh, we have always been friends," Jerome answered, more lightly; "he *is* my greatest friend," he added, a little stress on the "is."

"But he will not take your advice, I suppose, which I am sure is good, and backed up by first-rate reasons."

"Ah, Excellency, how little you know me! I have never risked offering anything that I was sure would be so unacceptable."

"That, I suppose, explains your handing the matter over to me?"

"Diplomacy, Excellency, may succeed," Jerome retorted, "where everything else fails, and you must acknowledge that when such is the hope, you are the most evident person to apply to."

"Flattery," his Excellency murmured, "may at any rate, you hope, inspire me to try."

For the rest of the drive it was of this interview Jerome's mind was full; he was still thinking of it as he mounted the well-known stairs that led

to his sister's apartment, well known, but so long unseen.

He was expected; Virginia's note telling him to come was in his pocket, and when he stood before the door he thought in a moment of the fears with which he had read it; this unacknowledged fear had risen up again, and gave an impatience to his knock. He did not even wait for a reply, but opened the door, and entered the room at once.

Virginia was the only occupant; quickly as he entered he saw her at once, standing before the picture on the easel, her back to the door, but at the sound he made she turned her head immediately, and then recognising him, gave a smile of welcome, though she did not advance a step.

He had never seen her look better, and he had a critical eye for her looks. The room was not much lighted; one lamp on the table threw a circle of crimson light in which she appeared—her tall, slight figure, sligher than ever, in a trailing black gown; her arms and neck gleaming through the transparent gauze. And, above the black, the brightness of her hair and delicate fairness of her complexion seemed intensified; and over and beyond the mere beauty and grace, some subtle sense of triumph and pride, which showed in the smile, in the very attitude in which she stood, holding out her hands in sign of welcome.

He closed the door and approached quite close before he said a word, always that following fear

close at hand ; and when her hands had clasped his, even when her arms were about his neck, and her kiss was on his cheek, he was aware of that instinct to draw back.

After all, only an instinct, gone in a moment, and he had returned her kiss, and was holding her at arm's-length, looking with lazy, accustomed admiration at her. But as he looked over her shoulder, his eyes met those of the portrait with that faint enigmatical smile, and he turned half angrily aside, and then smiled at his own thought, and with his arm still about her waist, began to speak.

"I am late, I fear," saying the first words that occurred to him, conscious of the shade of nervousness which he trusted was only audible to his own ear. "I had promised to go in to his Excellency on the way here."

"Promised?" she repeated, and he was rendered conscious of the slip he had made, but the slip had the effect of putting him on his guard.

"One is always making inconvenient promises," in his slowest tones ; "inconvenient *c'est-à-dire* when the hour of fulfilment comes."

"Men often find that out," Virginia commented, in her smooth, clear tones, and Jerome reddened under the words and tone.

"Sit down, dear," she said, pulling an arm-chair round into the red circle of lamplight ; but when he had sat down, she did not follow his example, but remained standing a few steps away from him, her

slender black figure thrown out from the background of dull crimson walls. It really was not easy to say anything, but a remembrance of those inconvenient words he had already uttered hurried him into speech.

"So you are back in your old rooms," he began. "Now, tell me your plans; I suppose you don't stay long?"

"Tell me yours first, they might affect or modify mine. When do *they* come?"

"To-morrow."

"Oh, Jerome," her voice altering suddenly, "that was a trick fate played you. When she was satisfied with Dolly, why, oh why, did such a *contretemps* occur?"

"She is more satisfied now."

"What is she like? The new foundling, I mean—handsome?"

There was a second's pause while Virginia's clear eyes looked down out of the shadow on to Jerome's face in the lamplight. She was not mistaken, she was never mistaken, and she was distinctly aware of the pause being not a vacant, but a thoughtful one.

"You are unlucky," she said, slowly.

"Why do you say that?" He spoke reflectively, but immediately afterwards looked up, and added, lightly, "On the contrary, I rather consider my luck to be the most commercial quality I possess."

"We have neither of us much else, have we?"

Virginia replied, "our good looks excepted, what remains but our luck? Mine," she added, confidentially, "never deserts me."

Something in the tone arrested his attention, which had half wandered to other subjects, and he looked up, a question on his lips, which was changed to an exclamation, as in the ruddy light there was a sudden flash from a great single diamond which gleamed and shone on her slender hand, on which never before had he seen any ornament.

He was roused now; he sat up; it was a surprise to him that his voice sounded calm and natural. "That means——" he began.

"Yes, that is the fate," she interrupted, "or luck to which I was alluding."

There was a low muttered exclamation. If the word was indistinct there was no doubt about the tone.

He was surprised himself when it had escaped him of the violence of the feelings it represented; he was unused to violent feelings on any subject. He made a movement towards rising, but she prevented him, seating herself on the arm of his chair, and taking his hand in hers.

"No, Jerome, the facts are there, and have to be faced, and made the best of. First fact, the present had come to an end. Then you must remember also that I am not a child. I am nearly five-and-twenty."

She paused. Captain Shore made no reply; he

had drawn his hand from hers, and now, with eyes averted, he waited in silence for what she had to say.

"The most obvious thing to do—to quote your own words—was to go to England to my father's relations. The idea does not smile on me. As you say, they always made me welcome, but a visit is one thing, and to be the poor dependant is another, and that is what I should have been with my two hundred a-year. Had they been rich, but they are not even that. Here we are German enough, and our English blood is not against us. In England we should be simply poor, and foreign in addition."

"I do not ask you to go to England," Jerome observed; "certainly not, if you do not wish it. I am not penniless, neither are you——"

"But then you want a wife," she interposed.

He rose up hastily, some impetuous words rising to his lips.

"And I want a husband." Virginia's calm words prevented his, whatever they might have been. "There was another course open to me"—she had risen also, she pushed aside a bunch of lilies of the valley, and took up a letter lying on the table and held it out to him.

"It is from Fernhof," she explained, "he wished me to marry him. It is odd, is it not?" she said, and as Jerome merely shook his head, and did not touch the offered envelope, she tore it across, with its enclosure, and threw it into the fireplace.

"It is odd," she repeated, taking a few steps as she spoke, towards where, in a distant corner, was a very narrow mirror that reached from floor to ceiling, and looked at herself critically.

He had followed her; he stood close beside her, looking over her shoulder with troubled grey eyes at the fair image in the glass.

"It would not have done," she said, speaking to that reflection in the glass, "fortunately it does not even tempt me, for can you imagine anything for which I am less fitted than to be the wife of a soldier in very indifferent circumstances. But it was nice of him," she added, "to propose under the circumstances. It was flattering to find he had not forgotten me. All the same,"—turning her head, and looking into Jerome's eyes,—“it strikes me as so odd his wishing to marry me!”

"And Prince Waldenberg?" He said the name stiffly, as if it were difficult of utterance.

"Ah, that is different," she replied, "I understand that. I am young, attractive, ambitious,"—with a little pause between each word, and turning back to the vision of herself—"he is able to gratify my ambitions, give me the assured position of which I stand in need,"—she raised her shoulders in a slight but expressive gesture,—“there is the whole story.”

"If so," Jerome asked, "I do not see where came in the doubt, to which you alluded in your letter."

"The Princess was the doubt, or rather the cause

of it," Virginia answered calmly; "it would have been better had I known her decision."

"Which is, I suppose, merely a matter of time?"

Jerome's question was hard and bitter, Virginia's answer smooth and calm. "I suppose so, in the meantime whilst she hesitates, I was her companion, free, or very nearly free to do as I liked, and I suppose habit had rendered me unwilling to change it, but——" She hesitated: "Well, time goes on, the Princess still hesitates, and——"

"And in the meantime Waldenberg might die."

"Or change his mind," Virginia suavely interposed.

"At his age," Jerome's tones were sharp and bitter, "one is justified in observing that life is precarious."

"Life is precarious at any age," was Virginia's calm reply, and Jerome felt reproved.

"It is very strange," she went on directly, "the way every one wishes to lay down a law for happiness, and rule his neighbour's life by it. Now I—you will excuse me, I am sure," and she laughed, lightly laying her hand on his arm, "I should not be at all happy living with Dolly, but I do not doubt," raising untroubled, clear eyes to his, "that you *believe*,"—ever so slight a pressure on the verb,— "such a fate would render you so, and yet you cannot be content with choosing your own way, but you want to choose mine also."

"If you have got what you want," Jerome began in wavering tones, well aware of the weakness that admitted the doubt.

"*If* I have," she repeated, "my dear Jerome, *I* never make mistakes," and he felt that her eyes did not leave his face, "*I* am not a man to stretch out my hand for a thing, until I am quite sure that I want it."

"Is that what men do?"

He felt he was leaving the sure ground he had held, and being drawn into what might easily become a dangerous position.

"Is it not?" Her swift, incisive words followed his, and she knew at once, some instinct told her, that the random shot had found a vulnerable spot. "What was it?" The question flashed through her brain and was put aside for future consideration, whilst she asked her next question, leading the talk to other and safer channels.

But when she had made herself acquainted with all she wished to know, the hour the Countess was expected, and various details of the visit, and Jerome had risen to say good night, she still detained him, as if there were something further to say, waited, almost as if she expected him to say it, but as he did not, "Jerome," she said, as he stooped to kiss her, "you will, I am sure, take an early opportunity of speaking to Prince Waldenberg."

"I have spoken to him several times already."

"Naturally. But new circumstances demand new introductions. You will come here to-morrow at six o'clock and meet him? The following evening I suppose you will be present at the Prince's reception?"

She paused, as if awaiting an answer.

"Virginia," Jerome exclaimed passionately, "I cannot approve, I——"

"Time will show you nevertheless, Jerome, that I am right—and I only ask of you to be outwardly civil—it does not cost much,—in our thoughts we must agree to differ. Time is the only proof possible, by which we can convince each other, in *your* case," she added significantly, "as in mine."

Somehow Virginia's reasoning was always so unanswerable, and he could not quarrel with her, he loved her. He stooped and kissed her fair cheek. "Of course I will do as you wish," he said.

"And I also," she retorted, looking into his eyes. "Well, I suppose we must accept the inevitable, and learn to feel that we both think the other has made a mistake."

"Do not compare the two, for Heaven's sake," Jerome exclaimed.

"No, Jerome," there was a little mocking smile at the corners of her mouth, "you may make your mind quite easy. I certainly do not do that." And then, as if repenting the mockery, "Tell me," she said, in softer, wondering tones, "are you really happy? I mean so supernaturally happy, that you are able to scorn my attempts, and my satisfaction with my lot?"

It always had been, always would be to Jerome, possibly as to every one else, so difficult to avoid the sensation that those clear, untroubled eyes saw to the very inner workings of the soul, and were

amused at what they saw. He was happy, he knew it, and yet under that look he felt as if a veil were lifted, and for the first time he was being shown what his heedless eyes had never seen. Heedless or cowardly? He was conscious even now of averting his eyes, shifting them from hers, as if to avoid the sight of the confusion that the lifted veil revealed, the confusion which had brought that mocking smile to her lips.

All his life he had feared her penetration and unsparing tongue, and those who knew them said that her quickness had driven him to adopt that slowness of speech which was almost a drawl: in self-defence he took refuge in it now.

"You must first define happiness," he answered, "and then I shall be able to tell you. It is disappointing that you have raised the doubt, because I always hope I am an example in that direction."

"I did not raise the doubt," Virginia replied, "I only asked a question." But she said nothing further, only kissed him for good night, saying, "*À demain*. Do not forget six o'clock."

He repeated her words, but absently. He had been evasive, and answered on a side issue, which was always the best chance when Virginia was inclined to curiosity, but yet he felt dissatisfied; Virginia had doubted his happiness, but it was not that he felt pursuing him as he stood out in the fresh night air. No, it was no use ignoring the pursuit, it had caught him up now. It was not

Virginia's doubt that disturbed him, but that the lifted veil had shown him his own doubt.

"Poor Jerome," Virginia said, when the door had closed behind him, "he has been unlucky! Unusual as such things are, I really thought he was going to be rewarded by a melodramatic ending to his love-story. Poverty and virtue suddenly finding themselves unexpectedly rendered noble and wealthy, and instead, how much more common a result! He has grown tired of the whole thing; he has not yet discovered it, but he will do so, and when he does—what remains?" She had returned to the position in which Jerome had found her, and was standing in front of the picture on the easel. "He finds himself—he who has never had to deny himself anything—the husband of a penniless, dull, amiable girl, with little character, and a good voice."

She gave a little unmirthful laugh, and turned the great diamond on her finger, till it caught and reflected the lamplight.

"No, I do not think, for all his prophecies, my unhappiness is as assured as his. It is useless to try and prescribe for other people, but one must be a fool if one does not know what one requires for one's self."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

“ You found Life’s hill-top low, so low,
 You crossed its summit long ere noon ;
 Thus sooner than one would suppose,
 Some weary feet will find repose.”

THE day had risen at length, which to so many kindly, vaguely interested people, meant so little, and to one woman so much.

“ So much, everything,” Emilie feverishly felt, and yet, let come what might, at the best it would be but laurel leaves thrown upon a coffin. Ah no ! far more than that, on this result rested the justification of her life ; as it seemed now, passion and pain were alike dead, only this one great longing remained to justify his hopes to the world,—to justify her acts to herself.

As long as Antoine had stood by, her faith and belief had demanded no proof,—belief in him comprised belief in his power, but with his personality withdrawn, something of her faith had faded also, and there was a womanly craving that the world’s indorsement should restore her own belief.

It was at the very busiest time that her father

touched by her grief, had granted her request, that for one afternoon the Opera House should be given up to her whim,—an evening could not be spared,—but though he countenanced her action, he himself took little or no part in it.

It was Emilie who had attended the rehearsals, teaching with infinite patience the correct readings of each part with which she was so familiar; it was she who had discovered the singer for the few songs. She would have liked Dolores, who had known him, to have sung them, but under the circumstances that had been impossible, and she had had to rest content with the best that could be found in a limited circle.

But the voice had so little part in it; it was the orchestral music on which everything depended, and with such a trained orchestra, she felt assured it was not in technicalities failure was to be feared.

Meanwhile M. Desprez, going about his own work, busied with his own pleasures, gained the sympathies of his hearers, as his eyes filled with tears, when he spoke of his daughter's infatuation; of his thankfulness at being able to grant her this thing she had prayed of him.

"For the music itself, I cannot speak of it." He shrugged his shoulders, "it is of another school. Well, it is not for me to criticise—the music is apart—it is of Emilie, Emilie alone, I think, for her I suffer, and this interest which I am able to give her has helped to save her life. It is not I, her father, who wish her to be punished for her mistakes; she

has suffered enough as it is,"—and his hearers echoed the hope, if it were not to be a *succès d'estime*, that it should at least be destined to be a *succès de sympathie*.

To Charles Desprez, that was worth purchasing now. Overworked and comforted by the calm and peace at home, it was only in these last days that he had begun to realise how much he was venturing on an uncertainty. And Charles Desprez had all his life steered clear of uncertainties, but with that strange faculty which rendered him subservient to every emotion, he had of late ceased to be the critical musician, but solely the sympathetic father. It was not of the possible effect of Antoine's music he was thinking, as he prepared to drive to the theatre on the eventful day, but of the young sorrowing widow, and of the effect her tragic story might have on the audience. Reviewing the story, as he smoked a cigarette after luncheon, the pathos of it struck him as it had never done before, his voice shook when he essayed to speak to Emilie, standing by him in her widow's weeds.

At first he had suggested she should not go, but later he was glad she had insisted on being present,—it would be a fresh note of sympathy for those present to know that she was there.

The performance had been well advertised,—anything was better, in M. Desprez's opinion, than an empty house,—and there was no danger of that. Every one in Ingelheim was interested in Emilie

Lütz, every one sympathised, either with her, or her father; there were even some by whom the young dead composer was not forgotten. Entering his own box, M. Desprez was gratified by the well-filled appearance the small beautifully decorated house presented, and nearly every face a familiar one. Whatever happened, he breathed more easily, there would be no antagonism; it was friendliness that had brought the company together, it would of a surety be a *succès de sympathie*. He noted many furtive glances turned towards his box, towards where, a little far back, was dimly outlined the black-clothed form of his daughter. With his arms on the ledge he leant forward, noting the various faces, returning a smile or a bow as he recognised an acquaintance.

Nearly opposite was the English party, who were staying at the hotel, and who had only arrived the night before—the Countess Miramar and the two girls; dear little Dolores, her shy, happy eyes had sought his at once, and in return he had waved his hand and smiled, while his looks wandered from the young face he knew so well to the tall, slight, lovely stranger by her side. Behind, in the dark shadow of the *loge*, he caught a glimpse now and then of Jerome Shore's blond head and grey eyes.

Other eyes noted the little group, noted and commented, reserving what she saw for future analysis and consideration.

Just as the first strains of the overture were

heard, a large private box, next to that in which were M. Desprez and his daughter, and which had remained empty till this moment, was opened, and two women, dressed in deepest mourning, black veils enshrouding them from head to feet, had, almost unnoticed, taken their places therein. Unnoticed, for there was so much else to observe, the Royal Box even was occupied—the Prince, Prince Waldenberg, and a couple of gaudily clad A.D.C.'s were in possession. Deep mourning had hitherto kept him out of sight, and it was an interest to the townspeople to be favoured with this view of their new sovereign. So far he had not appeared at any public entertainment, but this was different; he had acknowledged this tribute of respect to a composer who had died so early, and especially considering the connection in which M. Desprez stood to the reigning family. Over and above all, the Prince was himself an accomplished and brilliant musician, as was well known, and perhaps that had helped to his decision.

Anyway there he was, casting the radiance of his presence over the occasion. From where he sat, Prince Waldenberg could watch the veiled ladies opposite, possibly he was the only person present who knew who they were; it was only on that condition the Princess had agreed to go, and she had wished it; it might grieve her, but she had a wish to hear this music which, good or bad, would, she knew, be connected with her past life—the life

from which the moment of separation had come ; but she had known Antoine Lütz, and she had the curiosity to wish to discover how he interpreted the life which once had gone on around him. The title was all that any one knew as yet ; but however deciphered, it was in some way mixed up with the tragedy of the house into which she had married, for it was called "The Grey Lady."

Under her heavy veil she felt secure from the recognition she feared ; nevertheless, she took a seat far back, so much did she dread any chance turn of the head betraying her.

Virginia, with no such haunting fears, sat in the front, her eyes roving here and there, secure in the shrouding black. It was a conventionality, a mere conventionality, to be accepted as such ; and from beneath its shade she noted the full house, the various friends and acquaintances, with a delightful excitement in the escape from the dull routine of these past months, into even this faint attempt at novelty. Her eyes roamed everywhere at first, but oftener and oftener returned to that little group opposite.

She had called on the Countess directly she had arrived, but it had been strictly a visit of ceremony ; ten minutes' talk with the lady, and then Dolores had made her appearance, and it had been agreed that, to-day being occupied, the return visit should be paid the following day, when the Countess should take both girls to see Miss Shore.

"My two daughters," Justine had called them, Virginia remembered.

"Dolly is improved," she had thought as she left the room. "She stands better—speaks better, or perhaps,"—with a tiny shrug, as she stepped into her victoria,—“or perhaps is only better dressed,” and forthwith had forgotten all about them.

Until now—until in the security of her veil she could watch and take notes at her leisure. Not of Dolores, the Dolores she knew so well; just a little older, that was all, smiling that sweet, shy smile, blushing the while at M. Desprez's salutations from the box opposite,—but at that other girl seated by her side. She was dressed in queer, semi-Spanish fantastic garb, a combination of black lace and scarlet silk, the little red figured jacket displaying the beautiful curves of the figure, the slenderness of the waist, from which the full lace flounces fell to her feet. On her dark curls was set a soft black velvet cap with a red tropic bird—she was like some brilliant-plumaged tropical bird herself. But it was the face, the haunting loveliness of the face, that brought back Virginia's looks every time they strayed, for beauty always held a fascination for her.

Perhaps amongst all those present there was the greatest singleness of thought in Dolores's gentle heart. Great or small passions were disturbing so many; vanity and jealousy, or again vague interest or curiosity, but with Dolores, there was nothing of

this. There was pure, strong belief ; in her heart of hearts, Emilie trembled and feared the verdict of her little world, it was the acknowledgment of public opinion she sought and prayed that this day would give her, but to Dolores no doubts came. She had sat by the dead musician many a day when he had been too ill to move, many a day when his weak voice had delighted in telling the history of his work. As Antoine Lütz had believed, so did Dolores, something of his teaching had taken root. She measured success by his measure: it was not the world's verdict she gave a thought to, to-day, it was to the knowledge that she should hear his music, interpreted as he would have wished.

She was in a trance of pleasure from the moment the first note fell on her ears,—how well she knew it, —how many hours it brought back when M. Desprez was away, the sick man propped on his couch, feverish and excited, Emilie playing softly on the piano ; or other hours when she had been left alone with him, and he had told her the story as it developed in his brain, or she had sung for him some air that haunted him, and weakness forbade his attempting to play.

It was all a dream, a beautiful dream, in which these marvellous sounds interpreted, clearly as words, a terrible story of human love ; Dolores could only listen, unconscious of the dead silence that had gradually settled down on the audience, broken now and then by some swift, impulsive outburst of ap-

plause, silenced almost immediately, and succeeded by another silence, in which those assembled seemed to hold the breath.

It was approaching, the supreme moment she knew, and it seemed to her that the dead man was by her side dwelling on its beauties, explaining to her, what now needed no explanation, that which the music figured forth. Yes, this was the moment approaching, in which the musician himself had felt, lay hidden the solution of his drama, when that which life and love had failed to set right, death's stroke should do; he had felt that this was no gloomy tragic finale, but the explanation, the only possible one, of the previous overwhelming gloom. To Dolores, over-excited and entranced, it was as if he stood beside her, and was saying, as he so often had said before, not—"admire"—but "understand."

And she understood; understood, though her young, childish mind could not explain, only feel, what true ambition might mean; how loyalty and patience and enthusiasm may meet with success, although they never wear its crown. He had told her so, long, long ago, when she was quite a child, and the words had held no meaning for her. They had been standing together by the lake in the Palace gardens, a still, dull evening, she remembered it so clearly, and he had told her the story, just as the music was telling it now.

A moonlight night, still, warm, breathless; the air fragrant with summer scents, the water just touching

with faintest ripple the marble of the steps that led to the cold, dark depths below. A cloud across the moon, and then once more clear brightness and darkest shadows everywhere, and then a low, shivering discord through the tender harmony, and those two grey veiled forms meeting by the water-side.

One moment's terrified silence, in which one felt the frightened beat of a heart, and heard the wife's terrified cry. "I will not see your face,—the sight of it threatens the love of those of our house——"

And the half-mocking, half-fearing words which cut short her prayer, "Whoever you may be, *I* have nothing to fear! His love is mine, and I am not of your house to dread the vision of the 'Grey Lady.'"

And then, with the words of triumph, the words of fear alike, yet throbbing and trembling in the still night air, the sudden cry, the parted waters, the ripples quickened in their pulsations on the marble steps, and the dark waters holding their secret.

The music ended with a low note which sounded like a sob, a question, which asked if this were the solution of all the anguish and passion; it held a doubt as the musician himself had said, in reply to the girl's young confident decision that so it was best.

"How can *we* know what is best? Consider the tragedy which followed, the two so near together,

so far apart, and always between them that one memory."

There, on that night it had ended. He had asked his question, and gone his way, and Dolores's young heart had not felt the shadow of his doubt, had only appreciated the punishment that had deservedly fallen on the ill-doer. But now, vaguely, indefinitely—for we do not see all at once clearly—she understood what he had meant. To see the ill-doer punished does not give us back our happiness that he stole from us, that even dead hands may still hold. She was very young, and singularly simple in mind and thought; no complexities ever troubled her; but with something of the simplicity of a child, she understood that this was success as he would have interpreted it. Not this enthusiastic crowd standing up, shouting, clapping, crying "Encore!" but the knowledge that she, simple inexperienced Dolores, had understood, and felt the beauty of his work.

Once he had said to her, "We could see much more than we do, if we were always as much in earnest as we are sometimes."

Those words were in her ears now, mingling with the applause of those around. He had seen, had known, his earnestness had given him a touch of prophecy, and it had sufficed, giving him the patience and the courage to wait.

And whilst he waited, this drama had unfolded itself page by page, line by line, before him, a real breathing human tale of love and grief, and yet

hovering over it that faint intangible spiritualism, removing it from the region of vulgar passion into a spiritual battle fought out between the powers of good and evil.

And now that it was fought,—ended so far as these three combatants were concerned,—“Silence, silence,” some one cried, and there followed those last few pages—written, ah! Emilie could have told how and when! Propped up on his couch, with her arm round him, praying for breath to last till the last note was written, with the wife’s tears falling on the pencilled sheet, tears which courage and love dried as, breathlessly, feverishly, he wrote on; fighting each step of the way, with that unseen enemy whose hand was on his hand, rendering almost undecipherable the writing; at his throat, making each breath harder to draw; and then on his heart, chilling at last into rest him who had fought so well.

But there was no ring of defeat in those harmonies penned as he lay dying. There had faltered a doubt through those previous lines, but these were clear, and assured of victory. Death is not defeat, the notes rang out clear and strong. Love outlives death, and with life—pure perfected life—will meet us when we have fought this last fight. Death holds the passport which admits us into the fulness of life.

It was over—out of her dream Dolores was coming back to a consciousness of the prevailing excitement and enthusiasm—no measured enthusiasm, but

wild unrestrained demonstrations of admiration. Those with her were no less excited than the rest. Marie's hand, trembling and feverish, clutched her arm ; she turned at the touch, to see the dark eyes filled with tears—tears unheeded falling on to her scarlet finery. The applause with which the house echoed stirred her, till the beating of her heart was pain, and the red on her cheeks scorched. Some one else had seen those tears, some one else felt in that moment a link of sympathy which, until then had stood aside, and refused itself a name. He was standing close behind her, had risen as every one else had done at that supreme moment, was himself stirred with most unaccustomed enthusiasm, and then there had been a moment when he had seen the tears fall one by one, unchecked, unheeded, whilst he watched.

And all the time Virginia, whom enthusiasm and excitement did not blind but quickened to keener vision, was watching also.

It was a pretty picture, youth and beauty and enthusiasm—it was a picture well worth studying.

It is in such moments of exhilaration that we see people at their most natural, she always felt, and it is when others are excited, and we are calm, that the truest and most entertaining views of life are to be expected.

“More even than views, *revelations*,” the thought flashed through her mind, as that picture caught her eye. She had glanced towards it often, been aware

of every movement, every look, even when the surrounding excitement was at its highest.

There had been something in the air which she had not understood; she had known when Jerome stood by her side far more than he knew himself; with that subtle penetration which never failed her, she had recognised his present ignorance and had known it would not last, and now in those few moments Jerome's grey eyes, with some expression in them that she had never before seen, betrayed all that she sought to learn.

"Revelations," she muttered under her veil, "truly it is better, also safer, to have nothing to betray!"

The Princess had risen, moved also by the general enthusiasm, and was standing by her.

Her face was so completely hidden that it was impossible to guess what she felt or suffered. Her voice had grown to have a habitual sad ring in its slow unusual tones, it was impossible therefore to judge from that.

She looked down on the moving excited throng, some faint memory of former proud happy days surging through her as she stood there thus unrecognised, alone; no one, where once her presence had meant so much.

Opposite, so differently occupied to-day, was the place where she had enjoyed so many triumphant hours—so many—where *had* her thoughts drifted!

She was conscious of Virginia standing beside her,

through the thick folds of her veil she felt those clear-seeing eyes.

"Come in." There was a low knock, and his Excellency entered.

"Princess, you should have told me, you should not have come alone. I did not recognise you until you stood up."

"No one else recognised me even then," she replied. Her eyes had strayed back to the Prince, there was undoubted recognition in his companion's movement, as he bowed, though slightly, to Virginia.

"You should not have come alone," his Excellency repeated, words were still hard to catch amid the cries and confusion.

"It was a whim," the Princess replied. "It is for the last time, I suppose," looking slowly round the well-known house, "I wished to see it again, and such music! Ah, I have never heard such music in this house before."

"It is not in M. Desprez's style," Virginia observed quietly.

"Desprez, Desprez!" a voice here called, the cry a distinct one through all the loud murmurs and indistinct expressions of admiration, and at once M. Desprez's well-known form appeared in answer to the call, as he bowed and smiled his acknowledgments to the crowd below. His name was repeated many times by many voices, and then, joined to it, came an unexpected addition, "Madame Lütz!"

It was a note of sympathy called forth by the sud-

den realisation that there was no creator of all that beauty to call for, and idolise.

Some one had joined to M. Desprez's name that of "Antoine Lütz." Some one else said "Hush," and then came that loud friendly call for "Madame Lütz." Poor Emilie, there were no tears reddening her eyes as she sat in her darkened corner listening. Listening, fearing, trembling, only assured when that outbreak of applause told her his fame was won. Her tears had all been wept long ago, wept in agony and loneliness and sorrow; there were none left to come in answer to this facile emotion that had roused so many, this sentimentality which all felt more or less. No, her eyes were dry, though her lips trembled, and her thin hands were feverishly clasped, as she felt them taken into her father's cool firm hold; felt herself led unresisting to where she was within sight of all those upturned faces. She did not shrink from the sight, scarcely realised it was she who stood thus, whilst her father threw back her veil, and hundreds of kindly sympathetic eyes looked on her careworn face and weary features. No, it was only of him she was thinking, as she bowed, she *could* not smile, and recognised what all this meant—for him!

But if she was unmoved, M. Desprez's emotion was unmistakable. There were tears in his eyes for all to see, the word of thanks he strove to say was unintelligible, his voice was beyond his command, he could only stand thus, his arm round his daughter, his hand holding hers.

"Ah," Virginia sighed, as she turned to his Excellency, "I wish most fervently we were not strangers. I envy those in possession of the Royal Box. To have missed Desprez to-day is to have lost something that can never be recovered. Yes, of course," as there was a vague reply, "it is not empty," with a significant glance towards where the Prince still lingered, "but *men*," with a slight shrug, "are only men, they don't see all that there is to see."

"Fortunately—often for them," his Excellency replied.

"Wrong, Excellency," Virginia retorted. "One cannot see too much; where men are clumsy is in not knowing what to forget. 'Knowledge is power.'"

"And power, you consider, is always advantageous?"

"It depends upon the use one makes of it."

"The temptation, Miss Shore, is to use it, even when unnecessary, for the sake of impressing the fact that we possess it, at least, that I believe is generally the case—with *women*."

"I heard you, Excellency, though you rather slurred over the words——"

"But you were a little preoccupied; your eyes were turned towards—Rome," with a slight gesture towards the Royal Box; "I suppose," smiling a little, "it will not be so very long before you will view life from that favoured point again?"

The Princess remained silent; she may not have heard, may only have been inattentive, veiled as she was, it was impossible to tell, but her eyes were still

turned in the same direction as Virginia's, perhaps she was still dreaming over the past,—or future,—but now, as if the word had caught her ear, and she had become conscious of her straying thoughts, “Rome,” she repeated. “No—that idea has ceased to smile on me—another whim, I suppose.”

She had not been listening then, her thoughts had been elsewhere? She had been looking across, not towards the past—regretfully—as Virginia had half decided, but to where the future lured.

“Not material Rome,” she answered. “His Excellency was mocking me, in the name of women in general, who cannot resist letting their eyes betray the whereabouts of their hearts.”

The Princess reddened, she was conscious of it, conscious also that Virginia saw the blush through all those folds of crape, whilst, “Thoughts, not hearts,” his Excellency murmured—and then, more bitterly than he was wont to speak, “It is only women who believe they are the same thing.”

“A good creed,” Virginia retorted.

The door was opened, the Princess had passed out, was standing just outside awaiting her companions—

“A *safe* creed, Miss Shore,” his Excellency corrected, “and therefore probably the usual one.”

The Princess made no comment whatever, she was silent till the carriage was reached, and then—

“I will drive you home, Excellency,” she said slowly, and the old man took his seat opposite the ladies.

Virginia talked of the music, the people, M. Desprez, all the immediate topics of the moment, but the Princess was silent all the way, and yet his Excellency felt that her invitation had meant she had something to say. It was when the carriage stopped that she said it.

"The little English girl is here," she began, and he saw her hands clasp each other suddenly, as if she were in pain,—“I should like to see her.”

She paused, her hurried breathing was distinctly audible to both listeners.

“My stay here will be as short as possible,—unless the unforeseen occurs I shall leave in a few days. Will you be so kind as to see the Countess Miramar, and explain?”

She stopped again, her voice was unsteady when she continued, “And explain that I see no strangers, but that it would be good of her.” She stopped——“I receive the Prince on Friday,” she said in a calmer tone, “I shall be free to-morrow.”

“She shall come,” his Excellency answered. The carriage drove away, his Excellency entered his own house. He felt ruffled, disturbed, angry.

“I suppose it is education, training, circumstance, one ought to blame, but I am not philosophical enough, I merely blame the result—which is the unwomanly woman! Dry your tears as swiftly as possible, for fear of missing a chance in the new deal. And so the unforeseen, which is as good a name for it as anything else, will arrive at four to-morrow.

After all, Virginia's is the wisest course, to live so that there are no regrets, and no tears to dry. Especially," smiling as he recalled the Princess's misunderstanding of his words in the theatre, "especially, as in these cases, all roads lead to Rome." The unusual irritation having expended itself in a shaft of ridicule, his Excellency sat down to his solitary dinner, though, as it proved, not to a solitary evening, for he was still dawdling over a cup of coffee, when a card was brought to him.

"Show the gentleman into the library, and take coffee and cigarettes there. I will go to him in a minute."

"Prince Dorislaus Lescynski" was the name on the card.

This was not their first meeting, although that visit, of which Jerome Shore had been the herald, had not taken place. There had been a return of fever, the result of much travelling and many sleepless nights, and though the older man had once or twice been to the hotel where Dorislaus was staying, this was the first visit he had received in his own house.

"And did your doctor give you permission to come out to-night?" was his Excellency's question, after a glance at his companion.

"I am my own doctor, except in the question of how many grains of quinine."

"Ah——!" It was an expressive comment.

Dorislaus, who was standing by the mantel-shelf, gave a quick look in his direction.

"My health is not the important question for the moment, besides, I am getting all right——"

"I beg your pardon," his Excellency interrupted, "but I cannot let that pass. In the present state of affairs, it seems to me your health is the most important question."

"Why?"

The impetuosity of the word was out of keeping with the quietude of his attitude; there was always something about his calmness which represented restrained energy. His manner, movements, the very way in which he stood, so perfectly quiet, were sometimes contradicted by a sudden expression in the eyes, or intonation of a word. His Excellency put down his cigarette and leant forward in his chair before speaking.

"Because it is a very important question what a man does with his life, and the sooner you regain health and strength, so much the sooner can that question be settled."

"That question will decide itself in a very few days. I shall leave here directly I am well enough to travel."

"And do you mean," his Excellency had not taken up his cigarette, and though his words were slow and sarcastic, there was anxiety in his eyes, "do you mean to return to your English regiment—or perhaps to enlist in another?"

"That must depend on circumstances."

"The circumstances being, I suppose, where there obtains the least likelihood of peace."

"I am a soldier," Dorislaus answered, evasively. "There is no other profession open to me. And a soldier of fortune, with no country, it matters little with whom I take service. Why not with the English? I speak and understand English well; have lived much with English people."

"It is a universally accepted theory that the army, especially under such circumstances, is not calculated to enable its adherents to lay by much for their old age."

For a moment Dorislaus looked down, touching as he did so the iron ring on his hand.

"I do not come of a long-lived race," he said.

"It does not do though to count on that," his Excellency answered quickly. "But enough of folly," the sarcasm dying out of his voice, and rising to his feet as he spoke; "I have listened to you now, heard, I suppose, what you imagine to be your plans, and at the same time, though I am not a doctor—and you are—am able to realise from your appearance the chance there is in favour of your carrying them out! No," as Dorislaus began some interrupting words, "hear *me* now. I have a plan also, and, at any rate, give it a hearing."

He did not, however, continue, though Dorislaus stood waiting; it was almost as if it were not easy to put into words.

"Sit down," then he said abruptly, but his companion did not obey, though when the old man hesitated, as if waiting for him to do so, he rested one knee on the great leather chair beside him, and with his arms on the back, remained thus awaiting what was to follow.

"I am an old man," his Excellency began, and in his hearer's ears his voice sounded strange and moved, "old, and alone in the world. I knew your father and mother, and loved them both; for their sakes come and be as a son to me."

So swiftly said, so few the words, and yet here stood the one, his offer made, awaiting the answer.

"Do not refuse," his Excellency went on, in the dead, silent pause that followed, and as he spoke his old withered hand rested on the leather chair by the slender, brown hand, with its tragic memento, "not hastily. Do not fear idleness, I shall not attempt to interfere with your life, your profession; adopt what you will, only let me feel that your future is assured, as I can assure it, and that in return I have a son for my old age."

There was one quick sound like a sigh, it might have been a sob, and Dorislaus had hidden his face on his folded arms. It was fully a minute the old man waited, standing by his side in the same attitude, waiting, only that his hand now rested on the rough tweed coat-sleeve, and then Dorislaus lifted his head and looked at him.

"You accept?" he questioned.

"I cannot," Dorislaus answered. His eyes were full of pain, his face looked even more haggard and drawn, whiter, so it seemed to his companion, than it had done.

"But I am touched, touched," with an uncertain smile, "to speechlessness. But what could words say? You would have to feel," his voice breaking, "what my life has been, to understand what your words are to me."

"More than words—and I do not take a refusal. You must reflect, and take time and thought before you give your answer. The difficulties you foresee could probably be prevented. But not to-night," decidedly. "I have listened to you, and made my own proposal—there the matter rests," his voice regaining its usual tones, "and so now for my cigarette," lighting it as he spoke.

Perhaps there was an assumption of calmness greater than he felt—a calmness to which Dorislaus made no pretence. He had forsaken the chair, and was walking up and down the room, now in the circle of lamplight by the old man, and then drifting away into the darker regions that lay beyond. His calmness gone, it seemed as if he could not regain it; perhaps the fever which was kept at bay with such difficulty had something to do with his excitement.

After two or three turns, he paused at the further end by the unshuttered window, and looked out into the darkness, where, faintly visible in the garden

beneath, dim, shadowy trees waved softly to and fro.

"It is a pity," his Excellency's voice followed him, "that we have not profited by the example we have had before us, and developed Miss Shore's qualities; they would be invaluable in so many important moments."

"Miss Shore," for a moment turning his head towards the speaker, "what has called up the thought of her? A woman I hate!" he added, with boyish vehemence.

"How injudicious, how ignorant, *how young*," his Excellency murmured. "Hers is a memory always to be evoked when one is inclined to be—discomposed. Hate her! I am not nearly so ungrateful. If it had not been for Virginia Shore, my life would have been a great deal duller than has been the case."

There was a murmur that might have been dissent. Dorislaus was back once more by the speaker's side, was standing there, listening, though always with that expression of dissent.

"No, she is an example which, if we had attempted to copy, we should neither of us be feeling as we do to-night. She has recognised the great fact."

"Which?" queried Dorislaus, as he paused.

"*You* think there are several—she does not—which, of course, tends to simplification. Her great fact is, that when you go to a theatre, you are far

more likely to enjoy yourself if you have a comfortable seat, from which you can criticise the poor performance of the players, than if you are an overworked actor, with not quite enough strength, and very often not quite enough talent either, for the part with which you are intrusted."

"But one *cannot* choose," Dorislaus's voice was still angry and disagreeing.

"I am afraid she would disagree there, though she would scarcely be likely to argue. To see all the indifferent, bad, *impossible* actors floundering through their parts is really that which constitutes the amusement to the lookers-on; it is scarcely likely that the looker-on is going to show us how the exhibition is to be avoided. No, Virginia is a triumphant justification of the theory of adaptation to environment."

His Excellency's speech met with no comment; he smoked on in silence, whilst Dorislaus walked across the room again, and then took up his stand by the mantel-shelf, his back to the other occupant, whose keen eyes followed every movement, and thence, without turning his head, he said, after a few moments, "Miss Shore is to be married, I am told."

There may have been a slight question in the words. His Excellency said "Yes," with no addition to the monosyllable, as if in answer.

"To that old——" He began his sentence hotly, turning his head as he spoke.

"To Prince Waldenberg, the most important

person in Ingelheim after the Prince," his Excellency's calm voice interrupted him.

"It is shameful," Dorislaus said, shortly. With nervous hands he was moving the trifles on the shelf before him, his head once more turned away. His last sentence was more of an ejaculation than an attempt at converse.

"O Marriage!" his Excellency exclaimed, softly, "how many crimes are committed in thy name! Now, tell me"—the pause was scarcely a perceptible one between these words and those that had preceded them—"what was your object in coming here to-night? It was not merely to pay a visit, nor to recapitulate the vague follies that I have listened to; what was the reason?"

The hands fingering the ornaments were still. Dorislaus had heard, but he did not turn his head as he answered: "I want to see the Princess."

"She drives every afternoon at three," his Excellency answered, quietly.

"That is not what I mean."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I mean," Dorislaus turned round now and faced his questioner, and into his eyes as he spoke flashed a sudden flame, which died away directly. "I mean that I wish to speak to her."

"You have only," his Excellency observed judiciously, "to send in your name, write to Baroness Wildnave. You know how these things are arranged."

"I am mad, of course," Dorislaus interrupted,

"and mockery is as good an answer for madness as any other,—but that was what I came here for to-night." He was no longer calm, although he had discontinued pacing up and down, but stood quite still, and his hearer was well aware of it.

"That was what brought me," he repeated, "not without reflection," he added, "I thought of nothing else for three hours, and then I came."

"Where was Captain Shore? Out, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is dining with the Miramars. Of course, I understand you, you think," turning away with a passionate movement, "it is just a sick man's fancy, the result of loneliness and—fever. Perhaps,"—he was standing once again by the uncurtained window,—“perhaps you think I am delirious.”

"I cannot help you," was his Excellency's only answer, "and besides," he added, "it seems to me—objectless."

"Why?" Again one of those fierce interrogations, so out of keeping with everything, but the fire now burning passionately in the dark eyes—and as there was no reply: "I want nothing except to say a word of sympathy. You mean that *my* sympathy may not be very acceptable?"

"All sympathy is acceptable when it is heartfelt."

"God knows there is no doubt about mine," was the quick rejoinder.

His Excellency's cigarette was once more lying unheeded on the table beside him, he had risen; vague ideas, vague words presenting themselves, as

to how best to put an end to a conversation that was both useless and painful, to say nothing of the result, as he saw it, in the shape of another night of fever, and less chance than ever on the morrow of getting his visitor out of Ingelheim. But there was no time, before the right words had assembled themselves, Dorislaus was standing by his side, his eyes burning with fever, were looking down into his, compelling an answer. "Tell me — no — I insist upon a straight answer, is it true that she is going to marry the Prince?"

"It is not announced," was the only answer that occurred to his Excellency.

"That is merely playing with words — do you know it?"

"No."

"Do you believe it?"

There was a half pause. "It never does to believe in any woman's act until it is accomplished," he answered, recovering himself.

"Jerome told me," Dorislaus went on. "He believes it, of course, his informant is his sister. She knows, I suppose. Ah," despairingly, "it is too horrible—I will not—I cannot believe it!"

"If one wishes to understand other people's actions," his Excellency observed, tranquilly, "one must try and see them from their point of view. By this act she retrieves all she has lost, and she is an ambitious woman."

"No one — no woman," Dorislaus corrected his sentence, "can live on ambition alone."

"We have Virginia Shore before our eyes to correct that theory."

"Do not mention them, do not think of them together," Dorislaus exclaimed, passionately. "I will not listen to it."

"And yet," his Excellency observed, "it is to Virginia's influence that she is constantly exposed. I only mean that influence is a subtle thing, and the natural result is—imitation."

"You mean, Excellency, though you will not say it, that *you* believe it also," Dorislaus urged. "No, you do not *know*," as the old man shook his head—"no one knows, I suppose, yet. Good night," taking the other's cool hand in his burning clasp, "there is no use waiting and tormenting you any more; you have told me what you can——"

"Leave this place," his Excellency urged. "Go to Paris, I will join you there in a few days."

"I will see her first." He spoke absently, more to himself than his listener. "Even if I have to persuade Miss Shore, or bribe a servant, to let me in; I don't know which would be most unpleasant."

His Excellency shrugged his shoulders. "Previous attempts," he remarked, suggestively, "had not been crowned with such success as to suggest

repetition, but on the principle perhaps of *l'audace, toujours de l'audace.*"

"No," Dorislaus sighed impetuously, "success does not lie that way."

"And yet," his Excellency observed drily, "there *are* authenticated cases——"

Following the saying of his words, it seemed to his Excellency that there was a quick pulsation of the burning, slender hand that still held his own, it might have been fancy, or fever perhaps; the voice was quite calm now that said, "Tell me this, which day does she go?"

"To-morrow afternoon," his Excellency answered, looking straight into the dark, passionate eyes, "she has asked me to arrange for the little English girl, Jerome's betrothed, to go and see her; in the evening is the Prince's reception, which she does not attend; two days later she leaves for Italy, if"——he paused and laid a little stress on the words——"if nothing unforeseen occurs."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I am merely quoting her own words." He dropped the younger man's hand, and half turned away as he spoke.

"What did she mean by them?" Dorislaus insisted. "She must have explained them in some way."

Still the other hesitated, and then suddenly and quickly added, "Yes; she is to receive the Prince at

four on Friday. I suppose that is the meaning that *she* attaches to the words."

But when he was alone, his Excellency did not smile; he sighed as he murmured, "And it is always the *imprévu qui arrive*."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“Experience only can convince us, that Happiness is not a plant of this world ; and that, though many an eye hath beheld its blossoms, no mortal man hath ever gathered its fruits.”

THE evening of that eventful day on which Antoine's music had been produced held yet in store another excitement for Dolores. This was a visit from his Excellency, and the announcement of the Princess's request. “I repeat her words,” the old man said to the Countess. “You will I am sure be glad to grant the wish of a woman who has lived through so much trouble, and has known what it means to lose an only child.”

So it had been settled that the next day at six o'clock, his Excellency's own carriage was to come and fetch her. Poor Dolores, it was a terrible ordeal to contemplate, and her heart was heavy within her for the rest of the evening.

“Jerome,” she followed Captain Shore when he rose to go, calling him by his name, which was still unusual, and in such tones of trepidation that he looked down in surprise. Perhaps some slight sym-

pathetic chain had been wanting, as he had sat there that evening, besides most of the time Dolores had been singing, anyhow he had not known how troubled she was. Now, however, at the first word, he knew directly, felt the nervousness, and the need of sympathy.

"Yes, Dolly." He still held her hand; he had been about to say good night, but instead he opened the door, and drew her out into the passage, and led her into a room, lit only by a solitary lamp, which shed its light on a very dull apartment, at present used by the Miramars as a dining-room.

"Now, Dolly, what is it? Tell me. Trouble?" putting his arm round her shoulder, and looking down into her face. There was a shade of anxiety in his eyes that vanished at her first words.

"It is very foolish," she faltered, "I am sure, but I am so frightened about to-morrow."

"To-morrow," he repeated, and as she added a word, "Oh, the Princess!" there was unmistakable relief in his tones.

"Well, to tell you a secret, I do not wonder you are frightened, so should I be. Virginia is the only person who is fit for these things. Is she going with you?"

"No." Dolores shook her head, "no, it is dreadful to think of, I am going alone; it is very, very silly, I know," the sweet eyes were lifted for one second to note the effect of her words, and Jerome seeing the look, guessed its wherefore, and resolutely

forbore to smile. "But I am more frightened of the servants than even of the Princess—it is such a terribly long staircase."

"Dolly," Jerome answered, no, he was not laughing, but speaking quite gravely, "we will brave that danger together. You shall not mount that staircase alone, but by my side, holding my hand if you like."

"But may you," she began. "His Excellency said I was to go alone."

"His Excellency shall be reasoned with, shall be made to say 'Yes.' Does that comfort you? Yes? Dolly, dear," kissing her, "you are certainly the sweetest, dearest, silliest child in the world. But, there, don't fret any more, I will go to his Excellency, and will come to-morrow, and tell you all about it. Are you satisfied, comforted?"

"Yes, you are always so good, so kind." Her voice was a little wistful, he had reached the door, but he came back.

"Then promise me," he said, "you will not lie awake all night imagining things that are not going to happen."

She shook her head, but she did not speak.

"Because, if you will not promise," he added, "I shall go and fetch a sleeping-draught."

She smiled then. Jerome's whimsical remarks always made her smile, and seeing the smile he said good night and went.

But as she walked up-stairs she grew grave again. Poor little Dolores, life is never quite easy, though

of a surety it is most easy to those who do not doubt the kindness and love of those around them, who are content simply to accept, with a gratitude which is too true to fear being misunderstood, too humble to doubt its reception.

Jerome, sauntering back to his hotel through the quiet warm night, thought of nothing else all the way. Dolly's trouble, Dolly's perplexity, Dolly's childish trouble, such easily cured trouble,—the sentences kept following each other through his brain, it was of them he thought. He woke with a lighter feeling at his heart than had been there for some days—"Since he had heard of Virginia's engagement," he explained to himself—when he realised how it lay in his power to smooth her childish path, and make these trifles she feared easier for her.

It was still early morning when he sent her a note to tell her how well he had arranged.

"I shall call for you about six, and, chaperoned by his Excellency, shall not leave you until I have taken you safely past every danger. So keep up a good heart."

The Countess and Marie had arranged to drive out to some friends in the country. Dolores was quite alone, when at six o'clock the door was opened, and Jerome was admitted.

"Yes, I have come to fetch you," he said, as, visibly nervous, she rose up to welcome him. "It is early, I know, but I have come early on purpose. I

have something I want to ask you. You remember Prince Lescynski?" he questioned, as Dolores looked inquiringly at him. "Yes, of course you do," he added, hastily. "Well, he is here down-stairs, and he wishes to speak to you."

"To me?" Dolores repeated. All words and thoughts were drowned in amazement.

"So he insists," Jerome replied. "I keep on telling him he is mixing you up with some one else. He has been very ill, and is still rather feverish," he added, confidentially, "so I don't like to contradict him, and so—here he is. Oh, he is not dangerous," he went on, laughingly, "you need not be really frightened. Besides, Dolly, I shall stand outside, and one cry will bring me to your side!"

He kissed her as he spoke. "He said he would only be five minutes, and in ten we expect his Excellency, so he will not have much time to develop eccentricities. Dolly,"—he had reached the door, but now he turned back. "I hate secrets, and they are generally silly and unnecessary, but do not mention him to any one, not even to the Countess. He is going to-morrow, and then I will tell her myself, and explain the cause of the silence. It is his whim; he is ill, so we must attend to his whims, and for that reason I have promised to take you down-stairs to where he is waiting to see you; he does not wish to come up here."

One fire at any rate has the advantage of putting

out another's burning; in this new anxiety the Princess was for the moment forgotten.

There was a public sitting-room down-stairs, a room with many red velvet chairs and gilt ornaments, a glass chandelier, which rattled and jingled at every passing vehicle, and many mirrors, also gilt-edged; it was here in solitude that Dorislaus Lescynski stood awaiting them.

But it was only Dolores who came in, when at the sound of the opening door, he turned his head.

With his hand on the lock Jerome had stooped and whispered, "No, Dolly, this interview I decline to be present at. I shall wait here for about three minutes, and then I shall come and fetch you."

Till that very moment his thoughts had been elsewhere; he had scarcely given it a passing reflection. When Dorislaus had told him ten minutes ago that he was coming with him as he wished to see Dolores, he had wondered for half a second at the wish, knowing how steadily he had declined to leave the house, but had said nothing, glad of anything that suggested breaking through this morbid solitude. To see Dolly might be the result of momentary curiosity or friendliness, anyway it was better to take him than leave him alone in that unnatural silence, especially as there were evident signs of a sleepless night and recurring fever.

But now with the closing of the door all of a sudden seemed to start up a new and different theory,—a theory which suggested a very different

purpose in this wish which had seemed so natural, and to which he had so readily acceded. "He had good cause to know the folly," he repeated, angrily, "of which Dorislaus was capable! Was it possible that he, through carelessness, had let poor little Dolly be drawn into the complication. No, that should certainly be prevented," and yet, when his quick steps brought him to the door, he hesitated and took out his watch. No, he would wait, as he had promised Dorislaus, the five minutes, but there should be no mystery, he would put his doubt into words; at any rate, no shadow of trouble that he could prevent should fall on Dolly. He owed her that, at least. Those last words did not seem to be his own, but as if they had been uttered by some other voice, and he looked uneasily around.

Meanwhile Dorislaus had turned his head, and, seeing Dolores's slim young figure, had crossed to her side, and taken her hand in his. "You have not forgotten me?" he questioned. "No, I see you have not."

"Was it likely? If he only knew," she thought, "of all his name had meant to her. Of the tragedy and happiness that had come to her through him, he would not be likely to think she could forget him." Why, at the very memory a scarlet flush dyed her cheeks, and her eyes drooped.

He looked at her a moment longer, faintly wondering at the blush and evident embarrassment, which vanished in the knowledge that his memory was

correct. This sweet-eyed, graceful girl was but a child, and the idea that had occurred to him last night, was one to be attempted. "It was good of you to come, I wish to ask you to do something for me," and as she only gazed into his grave, haggard face in wondering perplexity,—“It is not much,” he went on, “though a great deal depends on it,—and I would rather ask you than any one else.” He dropped her hand, which he still held, took three or four steps across the room, and then returned to her, standing straight in front of her,—and speaking in a low, hurried voice.

“You are going to the Princess to-day, so Jerome tells me. I want you to say something to her. Not from me,” as Dolores’s eyes, filled with vague trouble, sought his.

What did she know? What had she heard? No, nothing, he was sure a second later, as: “What am I to say?” she faltered, and then added with sudden anxiety, “It is only that I am sometimes so frightened, and if it is anything difficult——”

“No, it is not difficult.” He stooped down, leaning his hand on the table beside him, till his dark eyes were on a level with her own. “It is this. Tell her that some one to whom she was once very kind, and who seemed ungrateful for her kindness, is very unhappy, and begs to be allowed to see her before she leaves Ingelheim.”

“Oh yes, I will say that.” Dolores’s voice was full of ready sympathy.

"You must not mention me," he said, his eyes never leaving her face. "I," more bitterly, "am not in such good repute that it would be an advantage. You can say," at the question in her face, "that a friend asked you to say those words, and that you know nothing more. But you need have no doubts, *I* know,—you believe me, don't you,—know that I would not ask you to speak for one who was unworthy."

"Yes, I believe you." Dolores's true voice said it, her frank eyes also. She felt, as much as heard, the relief in the grave voice that thanked her. And then the door opened, and Jerome's blond head appeared.

"Dolly, his Excellency will be here in five minutes, so I have come to give you a last chance of looking at yourself in the glass—and a most demoralising one it is."

But though he spoke to Dolores, and spoke lightly, his eyes had travelled past her, quickly, suspiciously, to where Dorislaus stood, his hand still resting on the table, his face still anxious and careworn. And there was no answering smile on Dolores's face, though she did turn to the glass, almost as if unconsciously. "Dorislaus," Jerome walked straight past her and up to the man, and laid his hand on his arm. "Dorislaus, when I brought you here, it was without one thought of why you came,—I was only too glad to bring you; but now I am harassed by a doubt. You know, I am sure, that everything I

could do for you, I would, at no matter what cost,—but Dolly is different,—none of your trouble must trouble her.”

There was a strange ring of real, unusual earnestness in Jerome’s voice, he spoke quickly too,—and though low, Dolores standing apart, heard every word.

“No, Jerome,” she said softly, before there was a reply, “he has said nothing to trouble me. He has only asked me to tell the Princess that some one who is in trouble wishes to see her.”

“Who?” questioned Jerome, but though he spoke to Dolores, he did not lift his hand from where it rested on the arm of Dorislaus Lescynski.

Dolores shook her head, it was Dorislaus who answered, “The name does not matter, there is no need for it to be known.”

There was a knock at the door, and a servant announced his Excellency’s carriage was waiting. “Come, Dolly.”

There was no time to say anything,—or only one short sentence, which Dorislaus said to her, as they crossed the hall together.

“When you leave the Princess, I shall be waiting—do not give the answer to any one else.”

It seemed to Dolores, stirred and agitated by these past moments, that it was impossible to regain the exact state of mind in which she had been before. Jerome was not quite himself though he talked, there was a shade of difference, which she could not

define. His Excellency alone was quite at his ease, or, if such were not the case, at any rate he disguised it better. He talked to Dolores kindly and gently, with a view to tranquillising the fears, of which Jerome had spoken, and though she was still nervous, there was always a fund of common-sense which might be relied on, in an emergency. She might make mistakes through ignorance, but she would never become silly and artificial, in whatever circumstances she might find herself. Shy, quiet perhaps, but always sweet, gentle Dolores. In her black gown and hat, there was something about her very attractive, his Excellency thought, and then he leant forward, and, "Captain Shore," he said, "were you alone at the hotel just now?"

"No," Jerome answered, with a half-glance towards where Dolores sat, watching with interested eyes the interested spectators, who turned to look at her, as she drove in this unaccustomed luxury by his Excellency's side, "Dorislus Lescynski was with me."

"I thought he never left his rooms at the 'Three Crowns'?"

"He never has before," Jerome answered, and with a slight attempt at evasion, "he was far too ill to do so with wisdom to-day."

"Has he gone back to his hotel?"

"Yes, at least I suppose so; he gave orders for the cab to wait."

There was a question hovering on the old man's

lips, an unmistakable anxiety in the eyes that still sought Jerome's face, but it did not find expression in words, and Jerome offered no further comment.

A few minutes later the carriage stopped before the entrance to the palace.

"I will send back for you," his Excellency said, "you will find the carriage here when you leave."

He pressed the girl's trembling hand, and smiled kindly at her. "The Princess has had a great deal of trouble," he said, in a low voice, "it will, I am sure, be a pleasure to her to see you."

The words strengthened Dolores, as reducing this terrible moment to a more ordinary one, and then Jerome was by her side, just the same as usual, he had even regained his cheerfulness, which the interview with Dorislaus had banished. He was always so thoughtful, so kind, when one wanted thoughtfulness and kindness. She could never, never, she felt, even at that moment, forget all she owed him on that score.

"I have a little business to attend to, Dolly," he said, as side by side they mounted the wide shallow stairs, "but I shall go to the 'Golden Lion' for a few minutes, by-and-by, in the hope of seeing you; to-night is the Reception here, and I have promised Virginia that I will take her,—these flowers are in preparation for it. If that man had not his eyes fixed upon me, I should pick that rose,"—pointing to a lovely "La France,"—"to brighten you up a little, you are as black as a little crow! Never mind,"

pausing, "you look very nice, and now that compliment has made you blush very prettily; what a good thing I thought of it, for white cheeks are most unbecoming to you."

Even Dolores's trepidation found relief in a doubtful smile, and at the same moment they had reached a door which held for her how many memories! She had forgotten everything but the past, as the attendant opened it, and before them was the room which had been the little Prince's schoolroom—playroom. "You will just wait here, Dolly, and in a few minutes the Princess will send for you. You are not frightened now, are you?" and when she shook her head, he turned away and left her. She shook her head, because she could not speak.

Jerome's departure was almost unremarked in the painful sense of loss that this once familiar room impressed on her. He had been such a dear child! His quaint words and ways kept recurring to her memory, as she stood there in the centre of the room, just where Jerome had left her.

"Any moment," she kept saying to herself, "that stern-looking man might return and tell her the Princess was ready to see her; she must not cry, she must not," and she turned towards the window, and stared out on to the well-known garden, whose waving trees and spring glories were blurred and misty.

Absorbed and miserable, no sound caught her ear, when the curtain between the rooms was lifted; it was the soft slow sweep of a woman's gown that

attracted her attention at length, and turning her head, it was to see the Princess moving towards her. Startled and embarrassed, she could only drop a hurried curtsy, conscious of the incorrectness of her conduct, and afraid that perhaps in some way she had been to blame; she, who had so often done awkward things, and under the thought her cheeks flushed, scorching beneath the tears which she felt drop from the lashes, and fall on to her black gown.

“I did not send for you, Dolores,” the Princess said,—yes, it was the same voice, or else Dolores felt it would have been impossible to believe that it was the same woman, the same slow lingering voice, of which every note was so distinct and clear,—“because I did not wish you to be shy, and his Excellency told me you were frightened.” She took the girl’s little trembling hand in her cool clasp, and Dolores, speechless still, strove furtively to wipe away her tears with her other hand. But she knew they had been seen, knew that with a kind of tender wonder the Princess was watching her, whilst she still spoke on. “It was good of you to come,” she said, slowly. “I wanted to see you.” They had passed now into the other room, and there had been a fresh throb of the girl’s heart, when she remembered the child who had held the curtain aside on her first visit here.

“I wanted to see you,” the Princess said, “to speak to you, to hear you sing again.” There was no emotion in her voice. She spoke quite calmly,

unimpassionately, and yet so changed, so terribly changed! It was an effort of memory to recall her as she had been. In strange contradiction to this thin, white, worn woman, kept recurring to the girl the thought of that other woman, white-clad, with the sapphires at her throat and waist, sapphires no bluer than the proud restless eyes, which now seemed even to have lost something of their vivid colouring, as they looked at her out from the thin white face.

"Sit down," she said, and so saying seated herself in a low chair and motioned her visitor to one beside her. "Sit down—talk to me," she went on directly, "tell me about yourself, where you have been, what you have seen,—done?" There was a note of feverish eagerness in her voice.

Perhaps she had not failed to observe the look the girl had given to all around. Seated as she now was—the Princess had her back to it—was the picture of the little grave fair-haired child; beside it, on a low table, was a photograph in a silver frame, a large, clever, lifelike photograph, and Dolores found her eyes wandering to it over and over again as she spoke. In a corner of the room chirped and whistled the bird she had given him; it was all too real, she longed to sob out the sorrow of her soul.

But it was impossible: there was something in those brilliant eyes, brilliant still, which seemed to forbid it, and she found herself talking, answering

questions, and all the time the tears drying one by one upon her cheeks. By-and-by, "Sing to me," the Princess said; "you will, I am sure, it will give me great pleasure." And Dolores rose obediently, and walked over to the piano.

"Sing just what you please," the Princess said, and then added, "one of the songs that you used to sing to us."

Was there the slightest tremble over the word? She was leaning back in her low chair, her slender hand—it had grown very thin—was on the arm, her eyes were hidden under its shadow, and she did not move whilst Dolores sang, "Entreat me not to leave thee." The pure beautiful voice rang through the room, the strong simple words, strong in their simplicity. In that expression of her grief Dolores grew calmer—it was easier to sing than to talk all the commonplace talk which seemed to have so little meaning, in the face of their great sorrow.

Something more, the Princess pleaded, when she stopped, and only anxious to do what she could, Dolores sat down again. The music soothed and calmed her own trouble, but if she had known, could have realised what it was saying to her companion!

But then, had such been the case, she would no longer have been Dolores Traherne.

To know that, she must have understood what it would be to possess a proud, passionate, ill-regulated, ungoverned woman's soul. A soul which had never

bowed itself to any higher law than its own desires and wishes, that had stood firm in its pride, and said "I will." And holding the world at bay, had chosen its own course, and insisted on it.

Reckless, determined, passionate, headstrong. And then to wake and find that there was nothing left, that only mocking voices answered her "I will," that helpless and alone she stood with nothing to defend her from the cold, heartless world,—ambition foiled and the heart broken by the same subtle blow.

The rays of the sun stole in through the window and touched her hair, falling as was her custom in two heavy plaits to the floor; against her black dress they shone golden red,—some memory touched her as she noted them,—some memory of other evenings when she had sat like this, and Dolores had sung, and the grave childish face with its ever-ready smile had waited for the music to cease; she could see the smile through the dusk that was settling down in the room, hear the voice, the sound of the careful footsteps.

There was silence, Dolores had been singing a long time; the Princess had forgotten to speak to her, she must be tired; it surprised her to find her voice was beyond command, that the tears were falling down her white cheeks.

She who never cried now; she had wept and prayed so passionately those first days when hope was possible, and then when passionate tears and

prayers were alike unavailing, she had rebelled in silence. What was the use of cries which brought no help? those prayers which brought no answer? Prayer does not turn back the finger on the dial, it only helps us to understand why such sad need arose; so when stormy, passionate grief sank into stormy, rebellious silence, there was no light within to catch reflections, and tell of a light beyond.

Dolores, seated in the dusk, with the shafts of light stealing over her shoulder and falling across the other woman, noting those tears, felt her own voice fail. She rose in nervous haste, and then stood, conscious of again doing wrong, now that those few steps had brought her nearer to her companion.

It was so difficult to know what to do; but the Princess had risen—how tall and slender she looked in her trailing black! The sun's rays had disappeared, the thick plaits were dull and red by contrast, and words had come—words, in that slow, musical voice, which always held a curious charm for the listener. "Oh, Dolores, my heart is broken!"

It was indeed a cry from a broken heart. Dolores, in her untried youth, felt it, recognised it. It was only with her own ready tears she could answer it.

"He was so brave, and happy, and beautiful," she faltered—these were the only words she could think of—"it would have been sad if he had lived, and grown different."

The mother's eyes sought the girl's: the mother's,

so worn, and haggard, and world-wearied ; the girl's, so young, and frank, and sweet ; something in the pure, sweet faith of the words arrested her attention — Dolores's faith, one felt, must be good and pure. The *source* of faith may be obscure — time and distance work inevitably towards that end — the source of the river may be veiled in impenetrable mystery ; but it is not the source with which we have to do.

What affects the traveller is, whether the waters are pure and life-giving, and in Dolores's gentle, timid words, there was some such faithful chord touched.

For a moment there was a vision of what the future might have held ; some bitter hours that perhaps this agony had spared, the beautiful young face might have grown hard and cold, or the brave blue eyes as haggard as her own.

Her jealous, passionate heart might have lived to know his love was no longer hers ; with a swift movement she turned to where the boyish face smiled up at her. The frank, sweet smile, which had been hers and hers alone, and which nothing, no years or loneliness, could now ever deprive her of.

For so long now, no one had spoken to her ; she had shrunk so determinedly from any sympathy, in word or deed. Somewhere, deep down in her agonised heart, was the dread fear that the sympathy so readily expressed was superficial, and

given because she demanded it. It was weeks and weeks since the little child's name had passed her lips, even to Virginia, her most intimate companion, the woman who was with her at all hours, who sat with her, with all these mementoes of the past around.

Something jarred ; it may have been the comprehension of what the key-note was—"Forget!" It may have been the memory of how the boy had winced, child as he was, under the swift words which, not even understanding, he feared ; any way, here it was different.

Dolores he had cared for, he had often spoken of her, constantly sought her company, and Dolores had loved him. Yes, there was no mistaking that. To every one else he had been, more or less, but always an important factor in a political game ; perhaps even to his mother there was an added pang to-day, when he was remembered only as her lost child ! But to Dolores he had been nothing of this ; he had been her playmate, the little loving, tender-hearted, fearless child, who had looked for her coming, and regretted her departure.

The Princess did not sit down, she walked over to the window, whilst Dolores, nervous and miserable, stood wondering what she ought to do ; but it was not long before she returned, and now there were no longer tears on her cheeks, though her eyes were still wet.

"Dolores," she said, her voice was not calm,

though she strove to make it so, "I wanted to see you, because my dear little son loved you; you were good and patient and kind to him, so it was not wonderful! It was a very unhappy moment to wish to see you, but you are good, and will not regret it, I am sure; you will be glad, I think, to know that it has been a comfort to me. Losing my little child," she said the words quite low and clearly, though after them came a quick breath that was sharp with pain, "I am left quite alone in the world."

Dolores's tears were again flowing fast, it was useless trying to repress them. To her young soul, it seemed the cruelest glimpse into the vanities of life. Such bitter mockery! This brilliant, beautiful woman, who, only a year ago, had seemed to her childish vision to stand apart from, and above the world in her pride and beauty,—and now, this haggard, broken-hearted, grieving mother,—all alone in the world!

It had grown quite dusk; in the darkening room the white face of the Princess and her gorgeous hair were a spot of colour, as she stood by Dolores's side wishing her good-bye. "For his sake," she said gently, "and because I think we both love you, I must kiss you,—and wish that your future life may be very happy!"

Dazed and miserable, the girl had already turned away through the dusk, before to her memory rushed those words she had promised to say, and which she had so nearly forgotten. But they must be said,

—at any cost of making a mistake, they must be said.

“Madame,”—hearing the faltering voice, the Princess, still standing where Dolores had left her, turned her head. Dolores, flushed and eager, was standing by her, “Please may I say something? I had promised.”

“Yes, Dolores, certainly,” the Princess wonderingly answered.

“I was to tell you,”—her voice was trembling and indistinct,—“that some one to whom you were once very kind, begs to be allowed to see you.”

“Who is it?”

“I do not know,” the girl answered; it was only on repeating the formula that she recognised she did not know even whether it were for a man or woman she was pleading, though in her own mind it was a woman she figured.

“I know nothing, except that it is some one in great trouble, and that you could help.”

“But how? Who told you to ask?”

“A friend,” the girl answered, but conscious of the evasiveness, coloured as she spoke. “But he is trustworthy,” recalling the words she had heard that afternoon, “and he said that you could help.”

“That I fear is not likely,” the woman answered, “but I shall be glad to try.”

Perhaps Dolores had grown calmer, she spoke more steadily, and lifted her clear eyes to her listener’s face, “Perhaps you could, perhaps it is

only forgiveness that is wanted. I remember,"—yes, the words were coming back more clearly with added calmness,—“I remember that my friend said it was some one who had been ungrateful, after a great deal of kindness.”

The Princess did not speak for a moment. Then she sat down and wrote a line on a sheet of paper. “Give that to your friend,” she said, “it will admit the ‘some one.’” She smiled, such a sad smile, “I should like to fancy I could do some good before I leave; and I am glad, Dolores,”—she kissed the girl again,—“that it was you who were chosen as the messenger.”

Such a gracious speech; it relieved Dolores’s anxious thoughts and fears, as with the precious paper clasped in her hands, she hurried down the shallow staircase, between the rows of blossoming flowers. So much absorbed in thought of that recent interview, of which wet cheeks and eyes still told, that she forgot to be shy or conscious of her loneliness, as she made her way to where the carriage waited.

Preparations were already going on for the evening reception, and possibly in consequence, there were fewer servants than usual in attendance.

His Excellency’s carriage was waiting, she stepped in and drove away, glad to feel that, at last, no curious eyes were noting her trouble.

Directly, however, they had gone beyond the gates, at a signal from a man standing in the road, the

carriage stopped, and Prince Lescynski appeared at the window.

“Have you an answer?”

His voice was quite low and calm, but there was no mistaking the feverish anxiety in his eyes.

For all reply, the girl held out to him the folded scrap of paper she had in her hand. He opened and read it. “You have been a most faithful messenger,” he said, and his voice shook.

“I could not remember,” Dolores said, gently, “whether it was a man or a woman. The Princess asked me, but either I had forgotten—or you did not tell me.”

“It is a most unhappy man,” he answered. “But I am glad you did not know,” he went on, “because I promised Jerome not a shadow of the trouble should fall on you.”

He hesitated a moment, and then: “There was another possible messenger,—Miss Shore,—but I wished it to be you.”

His eyes were on the ground, but he lifted them when he added absently, “Personality is so strong it would have come out merely in the repetition of a message,—besides,—she would have been amused. Tell me, though,” looking more earnestly at her, “you are unhappy?”

“Oh, it is too sad.” The kind sympathy brought back the momentarily checked memory, “To see her like that! She is beautiful, of course,” Dolores was nothing if not loyal, “but so changed, it would

make any one unhappy to see her. I cannot explain it."

Something in the dark eyes urged her on to speak, but speech was not her *forte*. "I do not know exactly how, but she is so different. Perhaps it is seeing her so unhappy and lonely, it seemed dreadful to hear her say it,—that she is quite alone in the world."

The subtle cause of her own trouble escaped her. Dolores was no analyst; it was only vaguely, indefinitely, she felt the added grief to one who had bound her ambition and her love together, and had therefore nothing left now wherewith to face the world. The man answered nothing; he stooped his head and kissed her ungloved hand, and leaving her, the carriage pursued its way.

Alone, Dolores dried her tears, but still thought over the tragedy. This other life also she felt held touch with tragedy. She did not wonder over the story, was not even curious; it was not her business, and Dolores's simple uncomplex nature did not trouble itself with what did not belong to her.

Something she owed to that quiet, commonplace English household in which she had grown up; some straight, simple, old-fashioned ideas of duty, which admitted of no complications, and knew no perplexing border lines, which trouble so many more inquiring people. Things were right or wrong,—things at least which one did one's self,—this development of the original theory was due to gentle

Emilie Desprez,—“And you were happy when you did right, and unhappy when you did wrong,” perhaps just as good a hope to start with as any other.

It seems—perhaps it is so ordained—that there must be a personal suitability in the recipient before tragedy can strike the spectator as tragedy. Virginia Shore would have said a good actor was required, or rather that it was a pity often to see the incompetent people on whom were thrust great parts, far beyond their skill, but anyhow in the eyes of the world there is a something required from the victim of the tragedy to render him worthy of the part assigned him.

It was this that Dolores felt, though she could not have explained, and scarcely understood. It was not the simple fact of her losing her only child that made the greatness of the sorrow, it was so much beside; losing so much with it, standing so perfectly alone,—and yet it was inexplicable, because it was only for the child's loss that Dolores really felt, or grieved.

Should Dolores be ever called upon to suffer,—to suffer as much as her tender, loving nature could suffer,—there would always be that well-balanced sense of proportion, which would prevent anything, however treasured, from usurping an undue value,—and a sense of proportion is, after all, a test of sanity, and we need never fear for the result of any grief, however terrible, on the perfectly sane.

But though her eyes were no longer wet, Dolores's nature was still unduly stirred, as with quiet feet she hastened up the hotel stairs. She felt the necessity of seeking some comprehending loving being, who should deprive this sorrow, she had been called on to witness, of its far-off mysterious sense of being beyond help or comfort.

It was to Emilie Lütz her thoughts turned, and with the thought came the memory that she had already promised to go to her on the following day, and talk to her of yesterday's triumph. Emilie would understand her, she always did, and saying so little, yet she always comforted.

"And in the meantime I hope Jerome will come to-night." Jerome's sympathy was unfailing, his kindness——

Her hand was on the door,—it was ajar,—just inside was a tall many-leaved screen. Her noiseless entrance into the semi-dark room was unseen, unnoted by its occupants, and on the threshold she paused; something, some lifted, warning, invisible hand, so it seemed, arresting her footsteps.

The room was not empty, though the silence of emptiness reigned within it. In the window, her chair drawn close up to catch the waning light, sat Marie Adios, a book in her hand, but she was not reading; perhaps it had grown too dark. One elbow rested on the window-seat, and with chin on hand, she looked out into the street. The man, for Jerome Shore was also there, was standing

some distance off; his face was visible, and it was the expression on it which had arrested Dolores's advancing feet.

She had known him so well, so long; had learnt to know the kind look in the grey eyes which always met her own, the steady, unfailing tenderness which she had learned to trust, but now she saw something different: something that converted the Jerome Shore she knew into another man.

His arms were crossed, he was not speaking, his eyes were turned towards the girl's averted face, and in those eyes was some strong, helpless, passionate grief, that seemed to strike Dolores's gentle, loving heart like a sharp knife.

She stood there thus—a wide space of time it appeared—until her own breathing sounded loud in the quiet room, while still the girl never turned her head, and the man never moved, or the pain forsake his eyes, and then the silence was broken: it was Marie who spoke—

“She ought to have returned; I wonder what she is doing. Dear Dolores; because she is so sweet, so kind, every one makes use of her.”

At the words, the man's face had changed, and Dolores, as if recalled to life, had shrunk back behind the screen, with the one idea of escaping, but Jerome's words reached her nevertheless.

“Dear Dolly,” he repeated, and his voice was just the same as usual, “I am going to marry her and stop all that.”

"Yes," Marie replied, she was still looking down into the street, her quick tones following Dolores as she turned away. "Yes, that will be best; it is a pity to delay, because she deserves to be made happy."

"There *shall* be no delay."

But Dolores had not heard Jerome's last words, she was slowly walking up the stairs to her room. Something had hurt, pained her terribly, terribly; she must go to some quiet place and think it over, and find out what it was, and strive to understand it. But she no longer felt able to hurry; she could scarcely walk slowly enough, because when she understood—ah, there would be something very grievous to face!

But Dolores was not a coward, not a moral coward at least, and to know there was something hidden away, some locked door she dare not pry into, would never find acceptance with her. No, all the chambers of her heart were open to the fresh pure airs of heaven, and there is restoring power in those airs which goes far to correct the evil of the world.

So Dolores in her solitary room, with her door locked between herself and possible interruption, sat down to try and discover what that sharp pain had meant. And it did not take long. We grow so unconsciously, but so swiftly, that suddenly, with the demand on our comprehensive faculties, we discover that words, looks, which would have

been unintelligible yesterday, to-day need no interpreter.

Perhaps she had been learning all the time; perhaps she learnt in one swift lightning-flash, but Dolores knew, almost before she sat down to think, what it all meant. It meant that he loved Marie Adios, loved her as he had never loved her—Dolores—the girl, the child, to whom he had been so tender, so kind, so faithful; he loved her—yes, and he was loyal, so loyal that he was going to marry her—no matter at what sacrifice of happiness,—and married to her, he would be all he had always been, a kind and faithful friend.

“I am so glad to think,” Dolores said, when at length she rose—some one had knocked at the door—“to know,” she corrected, “that he would never make any one unhappy. Never if he could help it.”

Outside the door stood Marie.

“Dolores, how did you escape up here? I have been watching for you so long! Captain Shore is here, waiting to see you before he goes to the Palace. Dear, how tired you look!” putting her arm about the girl, and turning her face to the light. “You have been crying? Oh, was it very sad?” her own voice trembling a little as she put her question.

“Very sad,” Dolores echoed, but there was absence of mind in the tones.

“Dear Dolores, never mind; now you shall go to Jerome, and he will comfort you. You will find

him in the sitting-room. Mother is up-stairs, and I am not going down again."

For one moment, conscious of the flooding thoughts of the past hour, and of the pain in her heart, Dolores looked steadily into the loving, loyal eyes that so frankly met her own, and then, with a sigh, turned away down-stairs—to seek Jerome.

The sigh was only pain, there was no room in Dolores's heart for anything else at the moment, no time to realise anything else.

The room was still unlighted, as she slipped as noiselessly round the screen as she had done before, and it was to see Jerome in much the same attitude, except that he had moved to the window, and was standing by the chair that Marie had occupied. But this time he heard the sound of her light footstep, and turned his head directly, a smile of welcome greeting her approach.

"Why, Dolly, I thought you had deserted us altogether," and then, seeing her closer, the laugh died out of his voice. "Poor Dolly, it has been very painful for you, I am sure." There was that ready sympathy to which she had grown accustomed in word and tone, and in the kind touch of the hands that clasped hers, and then his arm was round her, and his cool hand gently smoothing back her hair from her burning forehead. In itself the caress was soothing and tender, but for the moment, with that sharp pain at her heart, it seemed unbearable.

With a little effort she freed herself, and Jerome,

still holding her hands, looked down into her troubled eyes.

“Do you know why I have waited, Dolly?” he said, and his voice sounded grave in the quiet half-dark room. “Because I cannot go on like this any longer,—there is no necessity for it. I do not choose you to remain away from me; I can take better care of you than any one else, I am quite sure of that, so I am waiting for us to settle our wedding-day.”

Almost as he finished speaking, there was the sound of one quick sob, but Dolores was not crying, she was looking straight at him with dry eyes—the sound of that sob, however, warned and silenced him.

“Not to-night, Dolly,” he said, smiling, “you shall have twenty-four whole hours to think it over, and then to-morrow night you will let me know.”

“Yes;” she breathed the little word, but added nothing further, though her eyes, still with that sad, haunting sorrow, did not leave his.

“And to-night you will be good and sleep, and all to-morrow you will think. I cannot come during the day—I must be away—but in the evening I shall return, and you will have made up your mind, and will tell me.” He kissed her. “Good-night, dear, I must go: it is late already—so, until to-morrow.”

“Jerome,” she had followed him, her hand was touching his sleeve with a slight caressing touch “where are you going to-morrow?”

"I am going to Lorbach, I shall leave early, it is to see a friend who has written, wishing to see me, and this is my only day; but I shall be back at six, and shall then come here."

She made no comment, but it may be doubted if he noticed it, something had suddenly risen within him and pleaded for this one long day of solitude, in the fresh open country, where it would be possible, or at least easier, to ask and answer all those insistent questioners with their impossible questions. But with his hand on the lock, Dolores's voice arrested him again, Dolores's voice trembling and eager, and unlike the calm, childlike tones to which he had grown accustomed. "Kiss me, Jerome, for good-bye."

He put his arms round her and drew her close to him, and kissed her once, and she returned the kiss with some faint troubled touch of passion.

"Good-bye," she faltered.

He did not repeat her words. "God bless you! dear child," he said instead, as he turned away.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“A jester’s ghost is sad.”

DOLORES’S farewell did not trouble Jerome’s memory, when once he had passed the doors of the “Golden Lion.” He was hurried for one thing, and whenever a thought of the past came to him, it was in connection with Dorislaus, and those few interrupted words spoken in the afternoon, what had been the result? It had not occurred to him to question Dolores, his mind had been full of other things, but now, that anxiety recurred to him. What had been the result of that unknown mad scheme? Mad, he felt sure he was justified in supposing any scheme emanating from Dorislaus’s brain at the present crisis might safely be considered!

But troubled and anxious as he had been, these new, unusual feelings were swept away, when he found himself once again in the familiar room at the Palace, so familiar, that under the influence, all that was new and strange vanished, and he was once more the careless, light-hearted Jerome Shore of old.

He was always susceptible to influences, and of late so perplexed and troubled had been his path, that the rebound at finding himself free from care was proportionately great. The room was full of people—it was the first public evening reception held by the Prince—in this matter, he had announced his intention of following in the steps of the Princess, and the Thursday receptions were to continue as of yore.

Curiosity as well as interest had brought many new people to -night; the new Prince, the new Minister, his Excellency, Virginia Shore, they all had something to do with the assembling of those present to-night. After the Prince himself—indeed it may be questioned if even he came first, the public interest certainly centred in Miss Shore. After realising that he *was* the Prince, and recognising with a scant glance or short sentence his personality, there was little comparison between a rather stout, rather bald elderly man, and a lovely, black-robed young woman—the delicate fairness of her skin enhanced by the jet stars round her slender throat, the brightness of her hair rendered brighter still in contrast with the coronet of jet crowning her small head. His Excellency, watching her, found himself reflecting she was by far the person most worth watching present. “She is the type, the embodiment of success;—it is only a pity,” a gleam of amusement in the eyes which saw everything, “that she did not aim higher! She *might* have succeeded,” as he

noted the smiles her words were gaining from the Prince.

"She is the only one, I really think, of all those who were here a year ago, who can congratulate themselves to-night." He looked round the room and sighed as his looks passed the corner where the Princess, languid and beautiful, had been wont to sit. There that dark corner conjured up another failure, there he had often seen a dark, smooth head, and thence eyes dark as night had met his own.

"Am I growing dispirited and morbid in my old age? It seems as if Virginia Shore alone is to-day happy and content. Of course," moving towards where she stood, the Prince having turned aside to speak to another, "of course, her secret is that she understood her world, and fought it with its own weapons. Stay your triumphal march, Miss Shore, pray," stretching out his hand, "and listen to my congratulations; I feel that they ought to be offered in public."

"It certainly adds zest to most pretty speeches, Excellency," she retorted, — "pretty speeches in private are dull things, but in public—from the right person they are——" she paused.

"As valuable as another diamond necklace," the man finished. "You flatter cunningly, Miss Shore, when you infer *I* am the right person! I, the Setting Sun, was hurrying up to make overtures to the Rising Sun."

"Oh, Excellency, who flatters now? The wife of

the Rising Sun," and she sighed a little airy sigh, "is only an influence, not a fact."

"I steered clear of the fact, Miss Shore. There is a tribute to influence, surely."

"One can never argue from facts, Excellency. People are sometimes very wise, and sometimes very cowardly, with exactly the same results."

"I am sure you were never cowardly," he replied, "or, better still, you always knew when to be brave; and women like you," he added, slowly, "are born to be lucky."

"Yes," she assented, "my luck never deserts me."

"Ah! but you bribe him," the old man murmured, and at the words the faintest tinge of colour showed on her fair cheeks. "But there are cases, of course, in which bribery is legitimate."

"In diplomacy, Excellency, it is judged, is it not, by its result?"

"Though I have left the service, Miss Shore, I am not going to betray its secrets."

"Don't boast, Excellency; there was never a secret yet that was not discoverable—if worth while."

"You infer, I suppose, that few are? But you will, I hope, have pity on weaker mortals, who fancy the unimportant to be important when it concerns themselves, and strive to keep that hidden."

She looked at him a moment, her lips curved into a slight, mocking smile, her eyes clear and penetrating; and then, leaving his face, they travelled slowly round the room, until they encountered her brother,

who had just entered. There was the faintest shade of alteration in the expression, and then they returned swiftly to the keen-eyed watcher. "I am glad to see Jerome here to-night," she slowly observed, unfolding a great black plummy fan, on which glittered a diamond monogram; "it must be a delightful change from the 'Golden Lion,' and yet we must suppose he is happier there."

There was the very slightest arching of the eyebrows for only reply.

"It is a pity," she said, a minute later, "that men do not seem to understand the value of comparison. They don't ever go beyond the positive."

"It is the simplicity of their minds, Miss Shore; they are not nearly as complex as women."

"Their simplicity is barbaric," Virginia replied.

"Barbaric?" his Excellency questioned, softly.

"It is barbaric surely, not to be able to compare to-day and to-morrow. It is civilisation which teaches that all hours are not the same, and that it is as well to provide content for the greater number."

"I was wondering only ten minutes ago, Miss Shore, why it was that you were the only successful member of our last year's coterie: let me thank you for the explanation."

"I am not a barbarian," Virginia laughed; the momentary shadow of earnestness had vanished. "But I do not stand alone in that proud position, Excellency; not while Charles Desprez lives. Bring

him to speak to me ; it is always a breath of healthful air to speak to him."

His Excellency went on her behest, her words still in his thoughts. She was quite happy ; there was not even a shadowy regret for anything she was renouncing in this—so it seemed to him—unnatural marriage. No ; any warmth of feeling she had was for Jerome, whom in her own way she loved, and for him she only regretted that he had not done likewise ; though here came in her superiority to most women, and many men he had known. She did not attempt to lay down the law to others, which she believed and followed herself. Though she could not understand, her philosophy forbade her to interfere.

"She is unique," he thought, with a sense of admiration, which did not cause his heart a throb ; "and I can only fervently trust will remain so ! Intellect, I suppose, has entirely dethroned feeling ; but there is this one delight about her, she is not merely a clever, fashionable woman—the individual lost in the type—she has a distinct outline of her own."

Left to herself whilst his Excellency went on her mission, Virginia turned again towards Jerome, and lifted her fan as their looks met. A moment later he had reached her side.

"It is impossible to get hold of you in these days, Jerome," she said ; "I have wanted you all day. I wonder what you are afraid of ?"

"Afraid of !" he repeated, questioningly, but his

eyes shifted a little from the light mockery in those that were raised to his.

"There is an unholy fear of me abroad," and Virginia laughed, "though on the whole I do not think I am nearly as dangerous as many other women."

"Don't you!"

"Well," Virginia sighed, "you naturally know more about other women."

"Why?"

"My dear Jerome, you will have to take a course of Diplomacy,—you are growing as imperative and interrogative as"—she glanced round,—“but after all, I suppose new reigns mean new favourites and new enemies,—as Prince Lescynski. Where is he?" she asked, carelessly.

"Talk of inconvenient questions," Jerome began.

"He is no longer an inconvenient question," Virginia calmly replied, her eyes looking straight into his, which were visibly troubled. "I assure you," she went on, "you make me quite nervous. If I did not know that he was no longer *hors la loi*, and therefore quite at liberty to appear here to-night, in full uniform like all the rest of us—I should begin to think that once again he was hidden away in a chapel or a cellar, or some such place, of which you are keeping the key."

"All secrecy is folly," Jerome exclaimed with unusual bitterness, "and adds to the difficulties of life, of which, God knows, there are plenty!"

There was a ring of feeling in the tones; if any one else had displayed so much in her presence, Virginia Shore would have felt a thrill of excitement, and have responded to it,—with Jerome that was impossible. She did not feel, as many a sister might have done, here was trouble with which perhaps she might sympathise,—but, here was now a moment at hand, when, if she only kept her head clear and cool, she might, profiting by the knowledge she had already gained, help him to the happiness he had missed.

“Walk with me through the conservatories,” she said, “his Excellency has disappeared, we shall have plenty of time before he captures M. Desprez. I have wished to see you all this week,” she went on, as he silently opened the door, and they entered the houses filled with palms and faint blowing flowers, “but it has been impossible.”

“I came when you asked me.”

“Ah yes, to meet Prince Waldenberg, but that was not all I wished. You merely rushed into my orbit on a speculative visit, and rushed off again.”

“The truth is,” he said slowly, “you have removed yourself so far away, or perhaps circumstances have done so——”

“You *were* afraid,” she said, with a slight taunt in the words, “and there is no occasion,” she added slowly;—“as I told you before, we must agree to think differently. You wish me well, of that I am sure,—and you do not think I have gone a wise way

to work, and I," her voice falling slightly, "think exactly the same thing of you."

They had reached the glass door that opened on to the terrace; in the quiet spring night, the lake lay stretched out in a flood of moonlight, the fresh scent of lilac was wafted towards them on the soft night air, so soft, that there was only now and then the faintest rustle of leaves, it was all so peaceful that the contrast to his own troubled feelings brought a sigh from Jerome;—even Virginia, attracted by the artistic beauty of the scene, was silent for a moment. But only for a moment.

"Jerome," she laid her hand on his arm, there was not a shadow of the familiar mockery in eyes or voice, "it is not too late, do not persist in a mistake."

He did not exclaim at her words; he looked at her and then away towards the moonlight lake, she scarcely caught his words, so low were they spoken; "It is too late."

At any rate it was acceptance of the fact, it made her next words easier.

"You are still on the hither side," she said, significantly.

"It is too late," he repeated; "honour, truth, everything in me of good, tells me that." Calling up those allies, seemed to strengthen his voice. "I should be ashamed of myself for ever if I were to prove unworthy of her trust—and love."

"Oh, Jerome, it is a false theory you are acting on."

Never had he seen Virginia so moved; there was real feeling in the voice, real tenderness in the touch of the hand on his arm.

"It is not even fair to her that you should decide such a question alone."

It sounded well certainly; it was her future as well as his that was in the balance; for half a minute certainty was banished in a thrill of doubt, and then out of the darkness Dolores's trusting, loyal, loving eyes met his own.

"I am not afraid," he said slowly, "but that I can make her happy."

"Because she is a child," Virginia urged; "but she will soon be a woman, and then——"

"I am not afraid," he repeated, gravely, "her happiness will be in my hands, and I shall be answerable for it."

"Jerome, dear Jerome!" Virginia's bright head was pressed against his shoulder. "Do not sacrifice yourself for a mere idea. No," as he was about to interrupt, "listen to me. It *is* an idea, and a false one which will spoil both your lives. Everything," she paused, and her eyes, leaving his face, were turned to the moonlit lake, but though she spoke so low, every word in that distinct clear voice reached his ear. "*Everything* is within your grasp; you yourself know what that means." She felt the start he gave, but she did not stop speaking. "Own you have made a mistake, put pride aside, and throw yourself on her generosity."

"Which you know," he interposed, gently, "I should not need to do in vain. No, Virginia," he stooped his head and kissed her delicately flushed cheek, "we must agree, as you say, to see things differently."

"But in the disagreeing there is a vital difference," she said more quickly; "I only wish you to be happy," she paused, "whereas you wish me to be happy in your way."

"But you mistake, or misunderstand; if I did as you suggest I should never be happy again."

"Not under *any* circumstances?" she queried.

"Not under *any* circumstances," he repeated steadily, and his eyes looked straight into hers as he spoke.

"Folly, folly," she said, and by the impatience of her voice, he understood how troubled she was, and so saying took two or three steps away, and standing there, "I have never interfered with any one's life yet," she said; "it is not worth while. I daresay that is the reason; but I doubt—though I recognise the folly of the doubt—if I could stand aside and see you commit moral suicide."

"You mean, I suppose, that you are warning me that you might be able to save me against my will if you thought it worth while? I am not afraid"—his voice had lost its gravity, it was the familiar kindly drawl she knew so well—"first, it is *not* worth while; and secondly, your words would not have the same weight as my acts."

She was silent a moment. "You are right," then she said, "I shall not interfere probably for those good reasons you have given—that I should not be believed, and that it is not worth while. We are where we were—the usual result of argument—slightly heated, and each one retaining his own opinion, and in addition each one with a lower opinion of his antagonist's brains than he had before."

She shrugged her shoulders in the slight almost imperceptible way he knew so well. "Come, we must return, I suppose."

"Wait, Virginia, wait one moment. You have said your say, I have listened, now let me for once say mine. You pretend you do not care, but it is a pretence; it is my happiness you wish"—he hesitated—"you know, you must feel, how much I wish yours." He put his arm caressingly round her, and drew her near to him with almost unconscious violence. "You must know it is because I love you, my dearest, my only sister, that I wish you to stop; hesitate, count the cost, before it is too late; to quote your own words, you are still on the 'hither side.'"

"You do not understand;" she spoke quite calmly, reasonably, as one would to a child, and after his quick, passionate words, hers sounded colder, quieter than ever. "It is *happiness* that I insist upon having, and that I have found."

"Ambition, vanity," he went on, "call it what

you will, might gratify a woman such as you, but it cannot suffice, cannot—with any one, take the place of love.”

“And has your success been so great that you can recommend it?”

“Ah!” There was pain, a throb of pain in the low sigh; he turned away, loosing his hold on her, but a moment later was bending down, speaking low and quickly. “No, you know,—though *how* you know I cannot tell,—but it is because of what I have suffered, that at any cost, I would hold you back.”

“But Jerome,” she pleaded, stirred in spite of herself at the passion and suffering in his face, “stretch out your hand, take it, there is no need for words. Yes, as you say, I understand—follow my advice; is it not your happiness that I am urging you to take, if love will give you happiness.”

“Love would not suffice,” he said, sternly; “too many valuables would have to go overboard first——”

She looked at him wonderingly, curiously; in truth she could not understand, so could not sympathise, and he could understand no more when she repeated: “But I do not need sympathy or help; I have chosen exactly that which will give me all I require. I would have entered on no life in which I did not foresee in it everything I required to make me happy.”

Words were useless; unless the meaning to be expressed is the same, words tend to create barriers

instead of removing them ; they can, at the best of times, never attain to the delicacy of the thought to be expressed, and can therefore only serve to exaggerate diversity. "Shall I see you to-morrow?" Virginia questioned, as side by side they walked back through the conservatory.

"Not to-morrow," Jerome answered, "I am going to Lorbach, and shall be there all day, the greater part of the day at least, but the following morning I will call early in the hope of finding you alone. I shall want your help and advice."

She made no reply, but at the words looked straight into his eyes with an expression which told him his thoughts were read, that she knew on what subject her advice would be needed.

"What are you going to do in Lorbach to-morrow?"

He knew he reddened slightly, knew she saw it, as he answered, "I am going to see the Henckels."

Again no answer or even comment ; this time she did not even look at him, and yet he had the consciousness that his thoughts were read in the silence.

"I shall walk to the Henckels'," he added presently.

"I am sure they will appreciate your effort to call on them," she answered, in her smooth clear tones.

"Poor Jerome." They were back in the reception-room now, and she was smiling at those around, but her thoughts were still with him she had left. "Poor Jerome, rushing on destruction! Oh, Excellency," as the old man approached her, and Jerome

seized the opportunity to move away, "what would you do if you saw a man rushing to destruction as determinately as——" she hesitated, as if for a simile—"as Balaam," and something of the gravity which had found its way into her first words, vanished in the smile of the conclusion.

"My opinion would be," his Excellency replied, "that in such case neither angel—nor ass—would stop him! And what is Jerome doing?" he added immediately.

"One should never let other people's follies worry one," Virginia answered, evasively. "I am not quite certain why I have allowed this one to worry me; I call it love for Jerome," she lifted the soft feather fan she held, and waved it softly to and fro, "but after all, it is more probably personal disappointment, ambition, vanity——"

"Don't you think," his Excellency interrupted, suavely, "that you may as well give yourself the benefit of the doubt, and call it love for Jerome?"

Virginia laughed.

"Ah, Excellency, if we once began calling things by pleasant names, we should soon lose ourselves in the mists and fogs in which other people live."

"A little mist, even a little fog," his Excellency pleaded, "may we not be allowed?"

Virginia turned quickly towards him, and shook her head slightly.

"No, Excellency, it is troublesome at times to see one's self in distinct outline, but that one must pay for

by seeing others also in the same way. And without it, life would lose all its amusement."

"And after all," his Excellency assented, "amusement *gives more at a lower price* than anything else."

"You underline your words, Excellency, but it is the way of the world to wish to get as much as possible for as little as possible, and one does not wish to be at a disadvantage." She looked curiously at him as she spoke, conscious that something had escaped her understanding in his words.

"*You* will never be at a disadvantage," he said, in answer to the look.

"Whereas Jerome,"—there was again that unaccustomed note of trouble in her clear tones,— "chooses to ignore reality, and to wander in a mist just to suit his present convenience. Surely you do not sympathise with him?" as there was no response.

"Ah, Miss Shore, you are too philosophical for me—sometimes, though one may be apparently walking in a mist, one may nevertheless be walking by a clear light from within."

There was an impatient movement of Virginia's fan.

"Men are all alike," she said a little bitterly; "they are all prepared to pay a heavy percentage to-morrow, for the gain of to-day; of course," reverting to her usual tones, "it is unfair to blame them, because apparently they cannot see beyond to-day."

"And they are inclined to be ungrateful towards those who do."

"I should not care about gratitude," the words came quickly, unpremeditatedly, "if he would do what is wise. Ah," as if throwing aside an unpleasant subject, "words do no good; here is one who is always wise," as M. Desprez appeared, making his way towards them, everything, from the contented expression to the stephanotis in his button-hole, betokening radiant satisfaction with himself and all the world.

"Welcome," Virginia turned towards him: "we were just speaking of you, Monsieur. Do not be afraid,"—as there was a question in his look,—"even had you overheard, it would have done you good—it would have made you *purr*."

"Praise," his Excellency murmured, "the more commonly used word."

"We were praising your wisdom," Virginia went on, "and your success. You are as clever, monsieur, as if you owned a hazel-rod, which turned in the right direction."

"Don't you think, Miss Shore," M. Desprez answered gravely, "that sometimes, if one follows the dictates of one's heart, one is sure of some kind of reward?"

"Not always," Virginia shook her head.

"Ah, Miss Shore, you do not know, it is impossible for you to judge. If I had foreseen certain disaster in Antoine's work, I could not have resisted Emilie's pleading, Emilie's unhappy eyes."

There was a thrill of emotion in his voice, he

stopped abruptly, really unable to speak. His emotional sympathetic nature was responding to the strain upon it. The picture of Emilie, just as he had described her, was evoked by his own words, but the hesitation in his speech, the mistiness in his eyes, were due to the praises that had sounded in his ears all the evening, the praises which had enveloped alike himself and the music which had owed its demonstration to his discernment and tender fatherliness combined.

As he spoke to Miss Shore, it was this that was affecting him. He turned abruptly away, his Excellency's eyes following him with a mingling of perplexity and curiosity.

"He is now enjoying the *rôle*," Virginia's light voice interrupted his thoughts, "of the bereft father-in-law. In a few months Antoine Lütz will become the only real genius he ever met, a genius snatched from him, but"—she turned to the old man, and with a droll imitation of M. Desprez's voice and manner—"but by nursing him night and day, I managed to save his life long enough for him to complete the work which he intrusted to me, and which has since charmed and entranced the world."

"Ah, Miss Shore, you are a very harmful woman; I had doubts, but that voice, those tears, dispelled them, why do you bring them back?"

"Do not doubt," Virginia urged, "he is quite real; as real, that is, as every one else; he feels the part so thoroughly, that he cannot help representing it

well. I would not miss a first night for anything. And Emilie will encourage it by pretending she believes him, so that he can always rehearse at home."

"Vanity," his Excellency observed, calmly, "is a warm garment, without which many of us would go cold."

"Oh, Excellency, who is severe now?"

"You correct me justly, Miss Shore; severity at a comedy is unpardonable."

"Incongruous, Excellency. It is as great a mistake to be incongruous as impetuous."

"Do tell me why—I see Prince Waldenberg coming this way, and I do not wish to miss any chance lesson in ease and comfort."

Virginia laughed.

"Excellency, it is a pity you are going to leave us; no one can ever take your place."

With his hand on his heart he bowed.

"Don't tell me, *please*," he murmured, "that *I* am also a comedy which distracts your leisure moments!"

"No, Excellency," she replied, quickly, "you are the satire on the comedy."

"And you?" He was conscious of a slight prick in the words, perhaps it was the grain of truth they held, and it prompted his retort: "And you; then what remains for you?"

"Oh, I have no *métier*," she replied; "I am only a spectator—that is the reason that I enjoy myself——"

“You are right, quite right, Miss Shore ; temperament is the source of enjoyment, everything depends on it ; a runaway thoroughbred has not much pleasure from the scenery—no more, probably, than the heavy cart-horse it passes dully ploughing.”

“Your metaphor is brilliant, Excellency ; I shall never forget it. According to you, speed does not suffice for enjoyment, neither does mere routine——” She paused—a little inquiring look in her cold eyes, though her lips were still smiling—and looked interrogatively at the old man.

“I said a *runaway* thoroughbred,” he accented. “Uncontrolled speed is fatal both to one’s self and others.”

She looked at him curiously ; something told her that he was speaking from a text, a text she had not given him ; but the Prince had joined them, and further conversation was impossible.

She was right in her suspicion that his Excellency was not at ease. His mind was elsewhere ; youth has its charming gift of being able to lay its troubles aside and pick them up again by-and-by, but with age this is not always so easy. One is apt to be haunted later on ; and to be haunted means that at most inopportune moments the dreaded footsteps may be heard following us. Ghosts—all ghosts have their allotted hours when they are free to walk—but they do not all disappear at crow of cock.

That of his Excellency stood behind him. All

that long evening at the Palace, whilst he exchanged greetings with those there, and strove with the faculty that long practice had given to put aside all outward demonstration of the trouble that followed him; smiled at Virginia Shore's words, recognised Jerome's avoidance of him, which betokened more proof of what he feared—for Jerome *knew*, of that he felt certain, and was anxious to avoid betraying his knowledge.

The shadowy form followed him home; was waiting to welcome him there, to point with his finger to the fact that there was no message, no letter, as he had half hoped or feared—to murmur in his ear all that the silence might betoken—to show to his memory, clearly as in a glass, the proud, imperious woman, who had stood before him once in the pride of her triumphant beauty, demanding his assistance from insult; and then again the man who had so lately stood face to face with him, the passionate fire in the dark eyes; all that was left of youth in his thin worn face. "I cannot foresee the end," he said to himself, as he paced the room, "cannot foresee anything but unhappiness—or despair—whatever happens! My imagination, I suppose, was clearer when my heart was younger; now I see everything through my own suffering—the view may be deepened, but it is narrowed. I cannot bear to think of future peace bought at the price of present agony and despair!

"Such despair as he would feel, the son of a man

whom despair killed at twenty-one." Virginia Shore would say, Be reasonable; learn like me to appreciate everything good, no matter how different it may be from the especial thing you would choose,—and she is right, right—there is not a flaw in her philosophy, which is calculated to take you through the world without a pin-prick. And knowing the world, how much better to adopt the philosophy wherewith to meet it, and recognise that life is full of unfinished chapters which we are always coming across.

CHAPTER XL.

“Vaillans homs sans ‘mes’ et sans ‘si.’”

(A valiant man without “but” and without “if.”)

“Great passions end in calm, as the two poles are surrounded by similar spaces of silent ice-locked sea.”

WHEN Dolores had departed and the Princess was left alone, she did not settle down again into the peace from which she had risen to meet her. The interview had disturbed the apathy which had stolen over her of late, and which had served as a mantle to hide her from curious or pitying eyes.

It was so contrary to her nature that it had been with difficulty acquired, and with greater difficulty worn, and it was only fear of those eyes under which she lived, and which saw so clearly what she would fain have hidden, that enabled her to sustain it.

But though sorrow had tamed, it had not conquered her proud rebellious soul, and the unfamiliar quietness pushed aside, it was an alternation from a gust of passion that shook her to a wild flood of tears—to a hopeless, agonising despair, for which there seemed no comfort in heaven or earth.

It was a long time before she rose up, shaken with the violence of her emotion, to realise that it was growing late, and that before her stretched a long, lonely evening, in which she had promised herself, that whilst the reception took place in the other part of the Palace, she would find time and opportunity to arrange certain personal matters which she grudged to any other hands but her own. For the hour had struck, or was about to strike, when these rooms, in which she had lived so many years, were no longer to recognise her as their owner.

They stood as yet, just as she had always known them ; every picture, ornament, bit of furniture they contained, the link with some past memory, which, at the touch of this cruel moment, seemed to bloom into sight again. These long mirrors framed in white, with the crown and lettering above in blue and gold, had reflected her in the full pride of her triumphant beauty, when, by the old man's side, she had taken possession of her new kingdom. She had stood opposite them, when, young and beautiful still, in her heavy mourning for the old man, with colour unfaded and eyes undimmed with tears, she had recognised, that if it was not sorrow, at least it was honest regret she felt for one, who, in her young, uncared-for, ambitious life, had been uniformly kind and generous. Then the regret itself had died a natural death, in the pride and love that had centred in the child, whose small hand had

clasped her own. Now, almost unconsciously, she avoided meeting her own reflection in the glass which held these mementoes of her past,—her beauty, like all else she had prized, was leaving her also; she turned wearily away from recognition of the fact.

Everything here was alive with memories; nothing had been altered; the little chair by which she stood was the same——

She moved impetuously away, facing for a moment the two portraits on the easels, the old, kind-faced husband, the young, vivid beauty of the boy.

"It is all done with," she said, slowly—"finished, dead and buried; but—it is not everything. Ambition once was a grander dream, pleased me more than any other possible future. Something has gone, something—just now," with a catch in her breath, "it seems as if it were everything, but it is not! With one word I can regain much, much——"

On a low table near which she had been seated, littered with books and letters, near a glass filled with roses, was a photograph in a carved oak frame, surmounted by a crown—a photograph of the new ruler.

She lifted it, looked for a moment into the lined, worn face, then replacing it whence she had taken it, lifted her arms with a certain wearied, beautiful movement, and clasped her hands behind her head. She had wished, purposed, all through this day to think out now, in this silence and solitude, what she

should do; but brought face to face with the problem, her untrained mind seemed incapable of steady thought.

Vehement feelings rather than thoughts rushed through her brain as she stood thus, beautiful and dramatic, the attitude that of a woman carved above a tomb, the long, clinging, black draperies falling round her, the bright gleam of the thick plaits that touched the floor as she stood, the beautiful curve of the upraised arms.

No, it was impossible to think, but visions flashed before her of once again living through such triumphant moments as she had known; they had sufficed before, why not again! It would be worth something, nay, everything, to dread neither pity, nor sympathy, nor carelessness in every eye, but to be sure of admiration or envy, and as his wife—once again to stand in the position which had been hers. Surely that would be an antidote to pain, she would then forget——

Then almost before the swift torrent had flashed through her brain, she was kneeling, raining passionate kisses on the child's portrait she held. "Forget? Never, never! there is no fear of that!"

But immediately calming herself with an effort, she rose and walked away, conscious perhaps of the danger of falling under the influence of violent personal feeling at such a crisis—conscious perhaps of the hard effort it was to one of her nature to regain control once lost—which prompted her to avoid,

as much as possible, all violent demonstration of feeling.

It was almost strange that in a woman like her, so easily stirred to passionate gusts of emotion, she should have chosen to leave everything as it had been, risking the chance touching of a chord, through all these outward aids to memory. It may have been as she said, that she preferred to return and dismantle her own rooms herself, disliking the idea of careless hands touching the treasures of her life ; and in part there may have been a proud consciousness of standing amongst all these symbols of her triumphs, conscious of her decadence, and sure that no eyes, pitiful or curious, had detected a falter in her slow voice, a tear in her restless eyes.

But alone, ah ! that was different : standing now here alone to-night, it seemed as if the waters must rise and drown her. And it would never do to give way to useless floods of regret when it was the future, not the past, that called upon her for reflection.

For a moment she wished for Virginia's cold mocking tones to put the matter as she would see it, and guide her to the fate that was luring her. With her encouragement or mockery it would be easier, and yet all these months they had been together, with feverish earnestness she had fought away from any slightest chance word that might have afforded an opening to express an opinion, or give a counsel.

Now, evoked by that brief memory, it was Virginia's light step that crossed the room to her side, her light tones that sounded in her ear; her mocking laugh was so real that, in the dimness of the conservatory, she gave a nervous start and glanced over her shoulder.

Unreal of course, but so real, that the very counsel and advice she would proffer sounded in the darkness—if she chose to listen for it! Counsel to which she could add, “I not only give, but follow. There is only one thing that can fill a woman's life;” the cold clear voice had followed her into this darkened, silent spot: “Ambition, gratified ambition, power; everything else is a dream, from which one wakes to find nothing remains.”

A dream—there was some dreamlike sensation, emanating from the scented silence in which she stood, the twitter of the birds, the faint scent of flowers. Out of the dusk, another figure, a dream-figure also, had arisen, and was standing there with outstretched hand, as if saying “Beware!” Beware of what? “Have pride and power sufficed?” another voice was asking this question. “Now that you are not only widowed, but childless and alone, what remains to comfort you?” There was a quick pulsation of her heart, to which she vouchsafed no answer.

But not answering did not still the torment of the accusing voice, and there came some hurried longing to see his Excellency, and demand from him the advice and assistance which once she had refused.

“I want help—I am quite alone—no one to advise me! He might have come.”

The quick sentences formed themselves in her brain, and with some half-intention, she took up a pen.

But if he came, what could he say that she would care to hear. In these late days she had seen him often—if she had chosen, she knew she need not have appealed to him in vain, but with him, as with all the rest, she had stood on the defensive—a defensive that forbade even a word or look of sympathy.

Accepting sympathy is often opening a door which it is not easy to shut, and with such a door once opened, it might have rendered possible a warning for the future.

“No, I will not,” she said, and laid down the pen, foreseeing in the answer another voice joining that warning one, that had spoken to her but just now.

Torn with doubts and fears, it seemed at length as if in the battle-field of her stormy heart, two powers were struggling for dominance; one which spoke with Virginia’s voice and prophesied peace and happiness,—and one which only urged in low tones, yet of which she lost no slightest note. “You made a mistake once, do not repeat it,” and she did not deny the charge,—though to admit the mistake, was to admit so much!

“And after all,” lifting her head proudly, and looking round the darkening corners of the room as

if replying to the voice, "What was the mistake? I have been happy, always happy,—until now. There is nothing, *nothing*," with added vehemence, "that I regret."

And yet, saying the word, she hurried to where the oak coffer stood, and unlocking it, sought amongst the trifles it contained, until she had found the photograph which still lay hidden there, and lifting it for a minute, looked at the straight figure of the "Prisoner," the mocking eyes of the man who had betrayed him to his doom. There was no mistaking the likeness, no doubt whom the grave prisoner resembled. She looked long, and then a stormy sigh escaped her. "I do not regret," she repeated, but her voice faltered, and the restless eyes for a moment looked nervously round as if fearing a spectator, "it would be folly, madness to regret," dropping the picture back into its place, and turning towards that other photograph on the table. A servant entering with a lamp scarcely disturbed her until the light caught and reflected for a moment the sheen of steel in the open casket before her; she shut it hastily as she turned round.

There was a letter awaiting her, she opened it carelessly without thought; it was an envelope, containing merely the card she had given to Dolores so short a time ago.

"You can admit the bearer," she said, conscious of her still over-quickenened pulses and fast-beating heart; business, anything dull and usual and com-

monplace, would be an advantage, would help her to regain her composure, a composure that it was so important should not fail her at this most critical moment of all her life.

Dolores had said something, some words about trouble—sorrow,—what was it?—that she could help. With all these other maddening thoughts, it was difficult to regain calmness sufficient to remember what she had heard. She sought rapidly some clear memory of what the girl had said, but other thoughts had almost obliterated it.

“Some one in trouble whom I could help,” that was all that would return, “some one at least who fancies I could help,” but though the words forced themselves on her brain, they were only words, the storm of the previous moments was as yet too strong to admit of reflection.

She was still standing, the envelope in her hand, when at the reopening door she looked across the intervening space to see who it might be who sought her help.

For a moment as she looked, it was as if the reality had again vanished, and she was in the dreamland from which the letter had aroused her; the battle again about to be fought, the two voices again to sound in her brain—for a moment—and then some great strong rush of unexplained happiness, to which her tired heart had grown a stranger, was announcing that this was no dream.

“Prince Lescynski!” There was a falter in the

voice, but her eyes looked straight, unflinchingly, towards where he stood, sterner, graver than of old, but the same man whose voice, whose presence, had haunted her all this evening.

“You wished to see me?” she questioned, in the momentary silence which seemed an eternity, as she stood thus with the loud tumultuous beating of her heart sounding in her ears.

He had advanced a few steps nearer, only the narrow width of the table by which she stood separated them; it had not occurred to her to sit down, she was in the same attitude, the letter still in her hands, only that slight shadow, as if of fear, in her eyes, betokening her knowledge of his presence.

He had meant to speak at once; had prepared the words that should insure at least his expressing the sympathy he felt, had carefully conned them, whilst pacing up and down the silent road these last two hours, had foreseen everything, pride, anger—everything except this—this shadow of the brilliant woman he had parted from; the colour faded from her cheeks, the face shadowed with grief and pain, something lost of the full beautiful curves of the figure in the sombre mourning garments, only the eyes, vivid and brilliant as sapphires, under their heavy lids, seemed left of the woman he remembered.

“Yes,” he said, as she looked at him expectantly, “I wished to see you.” Something, a quickly drawn breath—it sounded almost like a sob—interrupted

him : he turned his head aside, it was impossible to speak, what could be said in face of such tragedy.

Perhaps she recognised the cause of his silence, perhaps was touched — she looked at him half-curiously, and then with averted eyes : “ She, the little English girl, said you wished to see me, that I could help you——” She paused.

With a sudden movement he threw himself on his knees beside her.

“ This is what I wished,” he said, “ to ask once and for ever forgiveness for the past.”

She did not move—her eyes were still averted—but as he paused, “ I forgive you,” she said, slowly.

“ And to say,” he went on, speaking more rapidly and in a lower tone, “ how I have felt, sorrowed—there are no words in which to say it—for every sorrow that you have known.”

Still she did not look at him as, “ I accept your sympathy,” she said, in her strange slow tones ; “ it is true, I feel it.”

“ Thank you.”

He rose up, and standing before her for a minute, “ Sympathy,” he said, slowly, “ can do little good—none perhaps ; it only means that if there is anything that I could do, my life, everything I have, is at your service.”

There was a sudden restrained vehemence in the voice, a quick flash from the dark eyes which contradicted the quietness of voice and attitude, the respectful calmness of every word and look.

There was no answering comment; she did not look up, her eyes were on the ground, but she was aware that when he had spoken he moved away, as if, having said those words, the object of the interview were over.

Those slow departing footsteps were mingling now with the voices in her brain, the loud beating of her heart, which was growing to be pain; through the length of the room they sounded, going further and further away, notwithstanding the soft pile of the carpet, each step sounding loud and clear—clear still, but so far away——

Her eyes were lifted now, with a sudden effort she spoke: "Wait." Her heart-beats were so quick that they seemed to suffocate her, prevent her speaking, the one word seemed to die away at once in the silence of the room, but he heard it, for he waited, and then took a few steps back towards her.

"Wait," she repeated the word, and he noticed the effort it was to speak; her agitation was unmistakable, there was a visible struggle for self-command in the tightly clasped hands, some strong, hardly repressed feeling in the eyes which once more met his own.

"I did not know you were here." It was after a minute she spoke, her voice still was not quite under command, she leant one hand on the table by her side, almost as if for support.

"Are you"—there was a scarcely perceptible pause—"staying here?"

Perhaps he read the suspicion in the pause: "I have been here for a few days, but I return to England to-morrow. I wished——" he hesitated, but meeting her questioning look, "I wished," he finished, "to try and obtain this interview; having succeeded, I shall return."

"Ah!" It was a quick breath, like a sigh, that escaped her.

"I was determined to succeed," he went on, speaking more rapidly, "the remembrance of the past has haunted too many anxious hours. I have been afraid always lest death should come and find me, before I saw you."

He was silent, but she made no comment, only her eyes had grown frightened, and as he came a step nearer, the fear increased.

"I shall not trouble you any more," he went on, "but this once it had to be. I was helpless, or I should not have come like this, but you forgive it with all the rest? I am sure of it, though you do not speak. Once before I came, as you know; it was with the same purpose, to pray for forgiveness, but you refused——"

"When do you mean? What do you mean?"

Her voice shook as she put her questions.

"I ventured a great deal," he answered, "but it was only to lose all. It was a long time ago, at a ball here. I followed you as I thought—hoped; I had been told that you were to appear as the 'Grey Lady'—under the circumstances it was unpardon-

able, I know. I was mad, so they all said. No," leaning a little forward, a hot flush for a moment rising to his cheeks, "I was *desperate*, and it seemed worth the risk. I never was lucky," breaking off abruptly, "it runs in the blood."

"What happened?" Her voice was very low.

"I followed the wrong woman, and only discovered my mistake when it was too late to set it right. But," he paused, "still I do not believe I risked too much. I believe that if I had seen you then, that night, I would have forced from you the words I wanted, that, angry as you justly were, I would have made you believe—and forgive! To-day, at least," something of the vehemence dying out, "I have wrung so much from fate. To-day you are gentler, more gracious, than I dared to hope."

"To-day," she lifted her hand and pushed back the hair from her forehead with a certain wearied gesture, "I am broken-hearted."

There was something pathetic and touching in the words from such a woman, words accentuated by the attitude, the expression.

There swept over her companion a wave of pity, that for a moment drowned passion.

"Words are nothing," he exclaimed, "as I said before, and there is nothing I can do to prove them! It seems almost an insult to offer compassion."

"I think," she said slowly, "my pride must be dead. It ought to be; I am left quite alone, I have

lost everything," with a little hurried breath after the words. "Everything I cared for is gone."

So saying, she hid her face in her hands. She was not crying, but he felt the influence of the emotion which had forced the words from her, the trouble in her eyes she was afraid to show. He was standing close beside her almost before she had ceased to speak; only a man's tenderness, protecting tenderness in his thoughts, at the sight of her trouble; all the thousand dividing lines forgotten, as he stood thus so near, that he could note how moved she was, the quickened breathing, the storm which had shaken her still visible in every line and curve, and standing thus, his eyes fell on the photograph of the Prince,—and something, something which had been forgotten, burnt itself out of the darkness, and showed him what he had been so nigh forgetting. But the waters once risen are not so easy to check; ten minutes ago he had felt so calm, so sure of himself, now—he felt that though words might be spoken, which he should eternally regret, they had already passed almost as much beyond his control as his thoughts.

"Tell me," and as he spoke he took her wrists in such a strong clasp that it was pain, drawing them away so that he could look into her face, "is it true?" glancing from the photograph to her. "They all say so—every one tells me the same story, but until you yourself confirm it, I will not believe it!"

His passionate eyes never quitted hers; he saw

the red mount slowly, painfully, into her white cheeks, and burn there a flame of colour, and in the silence and the blush he read his answer. "It is true, then," he cried. He loosed his hold on her wrists, she did not move at the regained freedom, but stood there close beside him, as if subdued into terrified inaction by his violence and passion.

"It is shameful!" The vehement words fell clear and distinct through the silence of the room, "shameful! A father or a brother would have the right to say so, and hold you back, if it were possible. I have no right, I plead none, I am going away now and for ever, I shall never see you again, but I would rather know you were dead, than go with this belief in my heart. My last word to you is this," he bent his head, his eyes brilliant with fever, his face white to the lips,—and as he spoke she pressed her hands to her heart as if in pain, and he noted even then the red line at the wrists, where with unconscious violence, he had held them. "My last word is this—that I should have thought that if nothing else could have held you back, the memory of your dead child would have had the power!"

If she had been unmoved before, that stab told. There was a low, sobbing cry, but he had turned away,—that should be, as he had said, his last word.

She had wished to speak, but she could find no words, or perhaps voice, and when at length that stab reached her heart, words would not come, only

a cry of pain. "What a cruel weapon to use!" Some such thought flashed through her mind; it had reached so easily that aching spot which she guarded so carefully from every rough or careless touch.

"He must not go like this;" she strove to speak, but it was useless, but through her over-excited brain that one thought hurried, "he must not go like this,—without knowing, knowing—there was something she must say. He must not think——"

In some countries where forest-fires rage, we are told that seeds that have lain long years useless on the ground, will, when the fire has passed, be found, the hard shell cracked by the scorching heat, sending up green shoots amid the blackened desolation around. Sometimes it seems to need just such desolating flame to soften into tender growth the human heart.

He had reached the door, his hand was on the lock, before she stood by his side. There he paused, and looked at her, as if in doubt.

"You must not go like this, there is something I must say first," her strange, slow voice, with its curious vibrations, sounded in the stillness,—vibrations, which always left a sense of dying slowly away, "Cannot you help me?"

"No," he answered abruptly, unlike his usual manner of speaking. "I do not wish to hurt you. By-and-by, I shall doubtless feel sorry that I have frightened you with my violence, insulted you with

my words, now—well, I suppose I am not quite sane yet——”

He had turned and faced her, was standing now in that attitude which was most familiar to him, his arms folded, calm apparently, only the expression in his eyes betokening how little under control his passions yet were.

Standing facing him, the light from the lamp caught and reflected the red gleams of her glorious hair, where the thick plaits fell across her black gown; her face was raised, still visible on it the red flush his words had brought there, her restless unhappy eyes sought his, but he avoided them, perhaps on purpose.

“Oh, cannot you understand!” she said quickly, and as she spoke, she laid her hand on his sleeve.

He did not touch it, did not move from his former attitude, but he was aware of the movement, for he looked down towards her, and said, “I do not wish to understand. I do not wish you to explain your actions—I do not wish,” a throb of pain in his voice, “to think well of them.”

“Do not speak to me, do not look at me like that! It is cruel—you have hurt me alike with your words and your touch. Ah, I cannot say it,” she broke off despairingly, “why will you not help me!” Something in her voice softened his sternness.

“You may have reasons, good reasons,” he spoke

more gently, "but I do not wish to be convinced by them."

"You misunderstand," she faltered, "it is not true."

"Not true," he repeated, vaguely. "You mean," a sudden throb of hope in his voice, "that that story—that report——"

She shook her head gently. "No, no, it is not true."

"Thank God." The words were uttered so low that they were scarcely more than a sigh of relief. "It was gracious of you to tell me,—I take it as a sign of forgiveness for all the past." He paused—she said nothing. Her hand still rested on his arm, as if she had forgotten the impulse that led to the action, he raised it to his lips.

"I cannot say anything," he remarked, "but I am conscious how unworthy I am of all that you have done for me to-day. It was generous and gracious. It makes my farewell easier than I ever imagined it could have been."

She was so silent, so still—he hesitated, half hoping for some farewell word, but none came, only her eyes, lifted now, sought his, with some strong, untranslatable expression of suffering, pleading. The red burnt still in her cheeks; through her slightly parted lips the breath came quickly, but the silence was unbroken, there seemed nothing more he could say.

"Good-bye," he said again, but before his hand

had touched the lock, her hands, both of them now, were clasped on his arm, with a certain despair in their detaining movement.

"Stay," she faltered. And then: "It is so hard," she cried, "*I cannot* say it. Why will you not help me!"

Her face was hidden now, hidden in the hands clasped on his arm. The cry seemed echoing through the quiet room as he laid his hand tenderly on the thick waves of hair that rested against his heart. Almost wonderingly he touched it, passing his hand tenderly, caressingly, over its beauty; for a moment wrapped in a strange sense of quiet which was dream-like in its unreality, and then in a moment he was vividly, overpoweringly, conscious of the significance of the movement, of the abandonment of her position, the detaining pressure of the hands on his arm, his own unforbidden caressing touch on the bent head.

With a quick movement he freed himself, the red flamed up into his worn cheeks, and then as quickly died away, his voice was hoarse and low, as, "Take care," he said, "it does not do to play with a man of my temperament."

For one second under the expression in his eyes she shrank back a step, almost as if physically frightened, and then: "Play," she repeated, and there was a despair in the gesture with which she lifted her clasped hands, and let them fall to her sides, despair in the tones of the voice, in the words

with which she turned away. "It is humiliating that you should refuse to understand."

Almost before the words had died away, she had entered the dimly lit conservatory, with the instinct of avoiding this brilliantly lit room. He would follow her, of that she felt assured. Those could not be the last words that still sounded in her ears—surely—surely—here, in the scented darkness, only vaguely illumined by the one faint light hanging overhead, that painful red which she felt still burnt in her cheeks, that softened, pleading expression, which she knew was looking out of her proud eyes, and which she could not banish, would cease to trouble her. With a certain instinct of defiance, she waited amongst the rose-trees, where the birds twittered and moved uneasily at her presence, as they had done once before—waited in outward calmness, though the beating of her heart was pain, and made all thought impossible; her eyes, with that strange unusual fire in them, turned towards the open door. Waited—how long it seemed in that stillness, with only her own swift-pulsing heart to mark the moments, till his footsteps sounded on the stone floor, and he was approaching her. He was walking quickly too, and the look which had frightened her in his eyes was there still, perhaps had not had time to fade.

"I cannot say anything more!" she exclaimed, involuntarily it seemed, seizing the first words that

came to her, holding out her hands as if to stay him, her voice faltering away into indecision.

There was no faltering in his; it reflected something of the expression that had terrified her. "I do not wish you to *say* anything. Kiss me." He took her hands in his strong clasp, and bent his head a little.

She said no word, made no faintest effort to free herself, the passion of the moment only betrayed by the sudden cold of the hands he held, as the swift blood rushed to her heart, leaving her face as white as death, the vehement imprisoned soul gazing out through the eyes, which still met his bravely. Standing thus near, he could hear once and yet again a quick breath pass her parted lips, whilst his compelling eyes never left hers, his hold on her hands never loosened; then something had conquered pride and ambition, and all the wild passions that had fought so long for the mastery in her troubled soul—and she had obeyed him—he was aware of the touch of her lips on his.

CHAPTER XLI.

“C'est sur son propre cœur qu'on aiguise la lame, dont on fouille l'âme d'autrui.”

IN Dolores's calm, quiet, unemotional life, it was a very unusual event to pass a restless night. It was a novel experience to toss to and fro feverishly, alternating between lying wide awake, and dreaming agitating, distressing dreams, and it was quite unnecessary to invent any excuse the following morning for not accompanying the Countess and Marie into the country.

She had announced her wish the previous evening of spending this day with Emilie Lütz, but though little had been said, Marie had looked forward to overruling her decision in the morning, but now that the morning had come, it was the Countess herself who decided that a quiet day with Emilie would be far wiser than the long drive, the picnic, and the excitement and talk inevitable on such an occasion.

They both, the Countess and Marie, came up and kissed her before they left, and advised her remaining in bed and trying to make up for the past night

by a sleep now, and she felt that she was dissembling when she falteringly said she would try. She said that, because they were kind and cared for her, she soothed her conscience by saying, "And because they did not know, and thought a good sleep would set her right," whereas sleep could only visit her when she had accomplished a certain task, which needed all her courage to carry through.

Directly the carriage had driven away, she rose and dressed, and then, her head still wearily aching, sat down to write a letter, in itself a task which was never easy, and under all the circumstances impossibly difficult.

However, it was accomplished at last, and with it in her pocket, she ventured forth into the bright sunshine, and made her way to the once familiar entrance to Miss Shore's rooms.

Yes, she was at home, and in a few moments Dolores found herself standing at the well-known door, ushered into the well-known room. It was empty, there was relief in the knowledge; here was another moment in which to try and think what it was she had come to say. She was very childish and simple, strangely so, in an age where every one is so complex and unchildish, and with all this year's training a great deal still remained of the longing for authority, and the habit of obedience. "If only some one would tell her what to do," had been the uppermost thought all night, though she had realised how vain the longing had been.

But it may be that in that acceptance of the authority which is set over us there is something admirable, something which makes life's difficulties more easily met and dealt with. Accepting the immediate orders without troubling as to how the results shall be borne, is often to acquire the strength for carrying them out. Obedience inspires the faith which is strength.

Now, however, had arisen a case in which she felt she could not avoid the responsibility, though perhaps the previous years of obedience were not unavailing at the crisis. She had not been into this room often of late—only one conventional visit since her return; but something of the old feelings returned, which had set it apart from all other places on the earth, as she stood there waiting. Something of that peculiar distinction which set Virginia Shore over and above every woman she had ever known came strongly upon her. Then, a moment later, the curtain was lifted, and she entered the room.

Yes, there was no denying her distinction. This morning, in Dolores's eyes, she was lovelier than ever—she was not a woman who had her days and hours of superiority, she was *always* at her best. The past year had done a great deal for Dolores—she had acquired a certain knowledge of the world, had learnt the conventional phrases which are always being called for, and though shy, was outwardly at least self-possessed; but when the curtain

was lifted and she stood in the presence of Virginia Shore, there possessed her at once that strange sense of admiring adoration which she had felt in those old ignorant days, when she had appeared to her childish eyes the embodiment of all the brilliance and cleverness of the world. She was dressed in a morning gown of some thin white woollen material which just touched the ground—no trimming anywhere to relieve the plainness, except the diamond brooch at her throat, her name written in little twinkles of light, which the sunshine caught and reflected, and the one large single diamond on her slender hand. Other women dressed well—Dolores had grown accustomed to that fact; but it pleased her to recognise with more critical eyes than of old that there was something apart from dressmakers' art in the perfection that signalised everything about her. And at the same moment Virginia was thinking: "After all, it has all done very little for her! She is better dressed of course, that is all; she is just the same little insignificant schoolgirl—a dear little thing;" but the attitude of mind was a mental tiny shrug, even as she said, "So, Dolly, it is you, come and sit down, and talk to me."

The rapid reflection was sound, but it was not a favourable moment in which to criticise Dolores's claims. Even the consciousness of a Worth dress is no armour against a dull, disconsolate heartache, which has kept one awake all night, and is making one's head throb painfully still.

Miss Shore seated herself, as she spoke, before a table on which she was at work, and for a moment Dolores watched her with interest. Virginia was very clever with her hands; whatever she took up she did in a clever, effective fashion, peculiarly her own. This was some quaint effect of modelling sprays of flowers across a panel of dull gold—the flowers standing out from their background in slight relief. She was engaged now in colouring delicate dog-roses and a few dull dark violet pansies—the whole effect original and striking.

“You will not mind my working, will you?” taking up her brushes. “My time is short—in a few days we shall leave here for a couple of months—and I want to finish this. And I am a slave, you know,” lifting her head and smiling, “for the present.”

Dolores did not smile back; she was perplexed and troubled.

“What is the matter?” Virginia wondered. She talked on a little, wondering all the time; but when Dolores did speak, she put down her brush—these were not the words she had expected. Perhaps they were not exactly those Dolores had meant to say.

“Miss Shore, you have always been very kind to me”—she hesitated, it was then Virginia looked up—“and I do not like to do anything without telling you. But I have made up my mind to go home.”

"Home," Virginia repeated, wonderingly; "is not your home with Comtesse de Miramar?"

The word had escaped the girl without thought, all during the night that had been the one idea, her heart turning towards childhood's associations: until Virginia repeated the word, it had never struck her that, in accepting the new life, she had forfeited the old. She looked up helplessly. "I can go to Miss Russell," she said, struck by that idea, "I did not remember," she faltered.

"Are you not happy where you are?" Virginia questioned. This was not what she had expected, perhaps feared—she had feared girlish confidences and questions and explanations, for which she was quite disinclined. No, something lay behind this—she was on the alert at once.

"I think it would be better for me to go," Dolores answered, vaguely.

"But why? You must have some reason—I understood from Jerome——" she paused there.

It was impossible not to observe the effect of his name. It may have been diplomacy that suggested its insertion, but such diplomacy was not needed. Dolores's lip was quivering, her tears kept back with difficulty, as from her pocket she drew forth a letter, and handed it to Virginia.

"A lover's quarrel," was the sentence—accented with an amused smile—that flashed through Virginia's mind. "To do your *duty*," accenting that word also, "in the spirit in which Jerome was

essaying to do it, was possibly not productive of good temper; he had probably let some sign of perturbation of mind escape him in the form of unpleasant speech, and Dolores was a year older, and so much the more *exigeante*." But though she was interested, and it was impossible for her not to be interested, still great discretion was needed, by her own words she was bound to neutrality.

"I wanted to tell you myself, because you have always been so kind to me," Dolores repeated. "I have been happier here than I ever had been in my life before," looking round with unconscious pathos—"and I wanted you to give this to Captain Shore—and to tell him——"

By one of those queer, involuntary actions of the brain for which we are unaccountable, as Virginia took the letter, she saw as in a mirror, herself standing by Jerome's side in the conservatory, urging upon him to take the step which would set him free, and on the reverse side, Dolores trusting her with her letter, which contained heaven only knew what childish nonsense, which might only rivet yet closer the slight claims she held.

She crossed the room and stuck the letter up in a prominent place on the mantel-shelf. "Jerome told me he would look in to-night, I will give it to him when he comes. Are you not going to tell me what is in it?" she asked a minute later, taking up her brushes as she spoke, but her eyes were on the girl, as she still stood in the same attitude.

"It is only to say good-bye," Dolores answered, gently.

"But why?" Virginia urged, for the moment personal feeling swallowed up in vague impersonal interest as to what had driven Dolores to take up such a position, and given her the spirit to stand by it.

"Has he been unkind?" she hazarded,—*"said anything unkind?"*

There was a quick gleam in Dolores's gentle eyes.

"He could not be unkind," she said, loyally, "I am sure it would not be possible."

"Then, Dolly, why are you not satisfied, or rather, why have you grown dissatisfied?" She had again laid aside the pretence of painting, and was looking with her clear eyes into Dolores's small troubled face, and at the words she saw the girl raise her hand, and furtively brush away a tear, but her voice though low was quite steady as she answered, "It is not *I* who am dissatisfied."

Virginia was conscious of her mind vigorously adjusting itself to solve the problem. To remain neutral; yes, that by her own promise was incumbent on her, but at the same time to know what this child thought and felt was no insignificant factor; it would be another aid—as all knowledge is—to rendering her master of the situation.

"Jerome would never be unkind," she said slowly, as if amending the last sentence, "to any one he was fond of."

"Yes, yes, he has proved that," Dolores answered, simply. "All the time that I have known him I have never once heard him say a cross word; he has been kinder, kinder," she added more vehemently, "than I should have thought any one could be."

"And yet," Virginia's swift tones finished the sentence, "and yet—it does not suffice."

There was no reply in words, but Dolores shook her head.

"What more do you want?" Virginia insisted.

"I want him to be quite happy," Dolores answered, gently.

"And are you not going to make him happy?"

Dolores shook her head again, sadly this time. "No, that is it, I cannot."

A burning curiosity possessed Virginia to know how and where she had made this discovery, what had been the means of revelation; something had occurred she was assured, sudden and insistent, which had rendered doubt vain, and she was conscious of an appreciation of the courage that had prompted the girl to act; courage was the one virtue that never failed to win admiration from Virginia Shore.

Sometimes it came across her, that in the midst of all their own self-seekings, vanities, and ambitions, it was this girl who had been sacrificed. It was necessary she felt the next moment, and with the next heart-beat she added, it was uncertain still if Jerome would avail himself of this way of escape which had opened out, in which case the sacrifice would

be out of all proportion to the follies that had led to it.

"He is fond of me, I know that," and the girl looked with a certain wistful earnestness into the elder woman's face, "but that is not enough—there is something more."

"Is there, Dolly?" The levity in Virginia's tones was possibly a rebound from the sensations of a moment ago, but Dolores, unheeding of the interruption, went on at once—

"Yes, you know, you understand what I mean, though you laugh, you understand, and I want you, when you see him and give him that letter, not to let him think that I am ungrateful. You are so clever," she added, with simple admiration, "that you will *make* him understand." She held out her hand, and Virginia, taking it, drew her closer and kissed her, and at the kiss Dolores came a little nearer. "You know I have loved him very much," she faltered. "I am not sorry, no, I am glad, because he has been so good to me, and always made me quite happy; but one could not be happy," as if in answer to some other voice, "unless one did one's best to make those we love happy." To this Virginia made no reply; she walked by the girl's side to the door, and when she stopped there, Dolores with unusual vehemence threw her arms about her neck, and kissed her fair cheek many times. "I shall never forget," she said, "how good—how good you have always been to me!"

Something in the words, their tenderness and loyalty, touched some strange, unaccustomed chord in Virginia's being; again came that swift, passing thought, that it was an ignorant, innocent child who had been sacrificed—— “If,” Dolores's soft voice cut short the reflection, “if I am mistaken, if I could make him happy,”—there was a break in the voice——“you could tell him where I am. If he came to me—that would prove it.”

Virginia was aware of the wistful look in the eyes that strove to meet her own; she felt the faint hope, the questioning hope, that those words had brought there—she turned her head away. The little sigh that broke the silence told her that the girl had seen and interpreted the movement, the door silently opened and closed, and Dolores Traherne had slipped away.

Left to herself, Miss Shore did not return to her work; she walked over to where the picture on the easel faced her, perhaps gathering calm from its contemplation.

“Now, if I were a man,” breaking suddenly into speech, “I should have allowed the sentiment, which a child's trouble naturally inspires, to ruin my whole life. I am really sorry for her, really fond of her, but at the same time,” with a glance towards the letter on the chimney-piece, “I am glad she wrote to *him*—and came to *me*. I wish, oh, how I wish,” with unusual earnestness, “that I knew what he will do. Of course,” resuming her interrupted occupation, “I know what *I* should do,

because to-morrow, and many to-morrows, are more important to me than one to-day. I know what *you* would have done," with a glance towards where the eyes of the portrait sought her own, with their little inscrutable smile ; "you would have seen the end in the beginning—and avoided the beginning ! but how can one foretell for another who does not realise, or, worse still, fear the end."

To be a little higher or lower, broader or narrower than those with whom one lives, multiplies immensely the difficulty of forecasting, and Virginia Shore was too clever a woman not to recognise the difficulty of prophesying in individual cases. To prophesy is always unwise, except in our own case, and then—alas, we know !

It was easier to sob out the whole story with Emilie's kind arms round her, her kisses on her cheek, than it had been to impart those bare outlines to Virginia. Emilie understood, she did not smile, the tears fell fast as she listened to Dolores's story, and she was not of another opinion, nor even silent.

"Oh, Dolly, dear, you are right, quite right ! We could never be happy unless we had done what we could to make those happy whom we love."

All through that long, warm day, Dolores sat there, listening to Emilie's gentle voice, preaching patience and love, and all the happiness that comes through sacrifice for those we love. It was a great

many hours, but they did not seem long with Emilie teaching through her own suffering, and then, as Dolores held in her arms the little baby which was all that remained of her vanished dream, that again seemed to give her a shadow of the peace she had lost. It was the most peaceful day Dolores had known for a long time. By some stroke of luck Herr Laurentius was expected that evening on his way to England.

"He will take you, dear," Emilie said, and Dolores, only too glad to realise that on some one else would fall the responsibility and anxiety of the journey, acquiesced.

M. Desprez was out, the two had the house to themselves for the afternoon, and it did not need much on Emilie's part to draw Dolores's whole story from her; but though she agreed, yet in her inmost heart she could not quite reason out what had led to this step, though it was her nature to put the reasoning aside, and feel assured that by some unexplained path, Dolores, in her simple rectitude, had arrived at what it behoved her to do.

The girl told her what was in the letter, the few simple words in which she had framed her good-bye, which was awaiting him in Virginia's charge, and when she had listened, she uttered a feeble protest.

"Dolly, dear," stroking the girl's soft hair as she spoke, "don't you think perhaps you have been hasty; would it not be better—fairer to him and to

yourself—if, instead of writing and going away, you were to go to him and ask him——?”

“No.” Dolores’s voice, a little unsteady, interrupted her, “There is nothing to ask,—I know.” The last words were whispered, but Emilie heard, and made no comment.

“And we are not made happy,” she said a little later, “even when we have got what we most wish. It could not make us happy,” Dolores’s simple, childish creed, as yet untouched by the world, “if it made others unhappy.”

There was the shadow of a question in her voice, which Emilie answered with a kiss. “And if I am mistaken,” the same words she had said once before, “and he came to tell me so, then——” she paused. This time it was not because of Virginia’s averted eyes, no, there was warmth and hope in Emilie’s hand on her hair, the kind caress of the arm which held her; this time it was her own words which brushed aside the half-kindled hope. “No, there was nothing for her to ask, she knew.”

It was not till nearly dinner-time that the Professor and M. Desprez came in; there was only time for Emilie’s hasty explanation of the service expected of him before it was time to sit down, with only an hour and a half before the train started.

Herr Laurentius’s voice was as loud and gruff as ever, his eyes glared as fiercely through his glasses, but Dolores’s heart was so overcrowded with trouble,

that there was no room left for fear, or even nervousness.

It was a relief to be beside M. Desprez, who was always gentle and affectionate. He did not ask any questions; no one else's business excited much interest or curiosity in him, unless it in some way affected himself, and in addition Dolores's eyes bore unmistakable traces of tears, her voice was unsteady, her cheeks unduly flushed—a word might bring a storm of words, some story which would only worry him to no purpose—and at this moment, just before dinner, it would be sadly inopportune. He did not argue all this out, but he felt it, with an instinct which never failed him, when trouble was in the air, so he accepted the situation without a question, and won for ever Dolores's gratitude for the kindness and tact which saved her any explanations.

Herr Laurentius was far less unobserving. "So,"—he looked at her, glared, as Dolores felt, through his glasses, and noted her flushed cheeks and tearful eyes,—“so the new scheme is to be abandoned like the old! What is the excuse this time?” He spoke gruffly, but he did not drop her small hand, which trembled in his great clasp, and with a force she could not resist, he turned her round towards the light.

“So,” he said again. “Well, you have tried the world and you don't like it—is that it? Then throw it over and come back to us, and we will make an *artiste* of you yet.”

Dolores shook her head faintly.

"I do not think I am clever enough," she said, gently.

"I'll tell you what *I* think," he said, in his loud voice, "I don't think you are clever enough to be made into a cold, hard, heartless woman of the world like——" he paused. Dolores had wrenched her hand free, something in her usually soft eyes prevented him finishing his sentence. A name had certainly been on his lips, but it did not pass them.

"I think you are unjust," Dolores said quickly; though she strove not to show it, he could see she was hurt. "I have met a great many women of the world now, and I have always found them kind and good."

"We judge as we find," he retorted, as if in apology, and then immediately added in his roughest tones, "No, we find what we take."

He said nothing more, but finding himself alone with Emilie for a few minutes after dinner—"What is the matter?" he questioned, abruptly.

"She is not very happy," Emilie answered. "There are difficulties," not knowing exactly what to say without breach of confidence. "She thinks that it would be better for her to go away for a little. She has told me all," she added, "and I quite agree with her. She is doing what is best."

"And you think it is best"—though he spoke harshly, he held her slight fingers, and patted them gently as he spoke—"that for some silly, girlish freak

she should give up a comfortable home with kind people, willing and able to provide for her? If she wants to do that, why don't you keep her here and let her go on studying. You, with your silly advice, have prevented her being an *artiste*, and now are again undoing your own work. It is folly, folly."

"We all make mistakes, Professor," Emilie answered, sadly, "I want to prevent Dolly making an irrevocable one."

"You don't know what *is* a mistake, no woman does! You are all so fond of arranging other people's lives, and you mismanage your own enough," he added, "heaven knows, to teach you to be more careful."

There was only a sad sigh for answer.

"I do not wish to influence her," she said softly, after a moment's silence, "but I do not wish anything to stand in the way of her following what she feels to be right. She is too young, too simple, to reason, but she feels."

"And so, *I* am to be sacrificed—with a troublesome girl on my hands for a couple of days."

"Dolores was never any trouble to any one yet." Emilie smiled as she spoke.

"She would be a great deal easier to manage if she were."

He laughed, a fierce little laugh, at his own illogical words, and followed Dolores and M. Desprez into the hall. Dolores clung to Emilie when it came to

the moment of farewell, the parting seemed to increase and impress upon her the significance of the action; the two men walked past them down to the cab which stood waiting at the door.

The tiny strip of garden reminded her suddenly of so many past happy days, the pinks were in blossom which bordered the narrow path down to the gate, and opposite across the road, the high wall, overtopped by the branches of the lindens, whose fragrance made redolent the soft evening air: it was difficult to realise a whole year had passed since the picture had had the familiarity of daily custom. It was good-bye to so much besides Emilie's sweet Madonna face, that it was difficult to frame the word.

During the short drive Herr Laurentius did not speak, but when the cab stopped, he patted her hand, as if encouragingly.

"You take care of the luggage," he said, "and I will get the tickets. No," as he noted the girl fur-tively trying to return her handkerchief to her pocket, "no, we will settle all our accounts when I have given you into Miss Russell's charge," and still in a sort of dream Dolores found herself following through the station a porter, carrying the Professor's battered portmanteau and her own small unpretending bag.

It was growing dusk in the great gloomy station; it was crowded, people were hurrying up and down the platform, buying papers, books, refreshments,

making their various preparations for the long night journey. From a distant platform was pouring a little stream of people from some newly arrived local train. A different class of passengers these from those departing by the night express. A few wearied peasant-women with baskets; a couple of soldiers, bunches of field-flowers in their hands; a family party, father, mother, a sleeping baby, and two or three excited children returning from a day in the country; types that told of a slow train stopping at every station along some quiet country way; and amongst them a tall, fair-haired, grey-eyed man, who walked quickly, looking neither to right nor left, after one swift glance towards the big station clock, walked so quickly that in a moment he had passed so close to where she stood by the carriage-door awaiting her companion's return, that one step would have taken her to his side. She had realised it in a moment. He had missed his train, the earlier train by which he had meant to return, and was now hurrying to the "Golden Lion" to keep his appointment with her—to hear from her. She did not even think out the sentence to the end; she turned her head, and safe under the shelter of her veil, watched his tall figure as he passed down the platform until he was lost to sight, and then she entered the carriage.

She was not crying; her heart was beating rather quickly, for a moment she had half-feared he might recognise her, an unreasonable fear, of course, still

she was relieved to know that he had never turned his head, given one glance in her direction.

Relieved, and yet so disappointed; now that he had vanished, there was a longing to have once more said Good-bye, once more have heard his voice, seen the kind expression in the eyes, which had never once met her own without a look of glad recognition.

“Where are you?”

The Professor’s loud voice disturbed her reverie, the Professor’s red face and spectacles were glaring in. “Bless the child, I thought you had changed your mind again, and had played *me* false this time, and had run away.”

With several angry grunts he entered the carriage, a basket of strawberries in his hand, which he put down beside her with a muttered “Very unwholesome, but you are sure to like what is unwholesome, girls always do.”

Dolores threw back her veil and smiled gratefully; it was not easy to speak, and almost immediately the train started.

The window was open, the balmy air was refreshing to her aching head and tired eyes; she gazed out, watching as long as she could see it, the dark mass of the town beginning to be lit up here and there with sparkles of light—they were far beyond the station now—the whole town was visible with the soft rise of the hills behind; she almost fancied she could recognise the mass of trees which marked the Palace gardens.

Overhead was a clear, pale sky, fading into a faint green, one star shining low on the horizon ; it was all so still, so peaceful, that involuntarily into her soul stole some reflection of its peace.

She watched till the twinkling lights of the town and its dark shades had alike slipped away into the darkness, and a sudden turn had brought them out into a wide expanse of fields and hedges, starred with wild roses, and she realised she had seen the last of the place which had been the theatre of her life for so long ; but even while saying "It is the last time," some other voice was clamouring, "Perhaps you will return, perhaps it is all a mistake." At nineteen Hope is not easily killed, even by knowledge, his shadowy ghost was whispering still to Dolores's troubled heart.

When Captain Shore found himself in the twilight street outside the station, he hurried on faster than ever. Of all nights this was the very last on which he wished to be late ; by some stupidity and miscalculation he had missed his train, and had had no resource but to travel by the slow one, maddening in itself, stopping as it did at every station, and additionally maddening at such a moment from its associations. It was the slow train from Neuheim which he entered at Lorbach ; the very one in which he and Dolly had once travelled together, and with the irritating peculiarity of memory for recalling unimportant or unwished-for events, every word

spoken on that journey was recalled, as the train slowly made its way from one station to another. As he stepped out on to the platform at length, and walked hurriedly down it, memory even vividly conjured up the very expression in the girl's shy eyes, as she had looked at him in gratitude and farewell, under the flaring gas-jet. And looking into those sweet visionary eyes, he passed close beside where she stood; perhaps some tender loving thought passed from her to him, for, "Dear Dolly," his lips framed as he stood out in the street, "nothing would be too bad for a man who could betray such love and trust."

But when at the "Golden Lion" he was told that the Countess had not yet returned, there was an inexplicable sensation of relief in mind and body; he had had a long, most wearying day; he had done his best, and now fate had interfered.

"Tell the Countess when she returns, that as it is so late, I will postpone my visit till the morning. That I shall call early, hoping she will be able to receive me."

No thought of asking for Dolores entered his head. The evening before the party had been planned to include all three, and it never struck him to think of them as separate.

There was a distinct sensation of relief as he went on to his hotel. There a line awaited him from his sister: "Do not forget you have promised to come this evening. I shall expect you.—V." No, he had

not forgotten—but if it had not been for this note, he had intended to postpone that visit as well as the other till the following day.

After changing his clothes and eating a short dinner, he started for the Palace.

He had felt disinclined to go at first—the disinclination of a man to move away anywhere after a long tiring day—but when he ventured into the street, and found himself in the fresh night air, cheered and comforted by his dinner, he was almost glad to think that he had not any more lonely hours in front of him, in which thought might again assail him. He had had enough, his mind was wearied, and doubts and longings would easily take possession of him again, if the field were left open. He knew Virginia well enough, to be sure that he need not fear a renewal of the subject from her. She was never a woman to tire one with a subject, or to bring it forward when a man was likely to agree merely to save trouble. She knew of how much value such agreement was likely to be. It only meant belief of victory to-night, with the assurance of defeat to-morrow, and life was too short to be wasted in such unsatisfactory warfare.

No, she had said her say yesterday. The chances are the subject would never be mentioned again: only in her eyes and her mocking laugh—he reddened a little at the thought—should he read how no detail of his mistake would escape her.

“Mistake”—he found himself angrily repeating

the word, as if it had been spoken aloud, and then smiled to find he was alone, standing at Virginia's door.

"Yes, Miss Shore was expecting him."

He knocked and entered the room. "Ah, Jerome, you were so late, I began to fear you were not coming."

She glanced at him anxiously as she spoke.

"Had he heard anything—learnt anything?"

"I missed my train," he answered, tranquilly, "and so only got back about half-past eight. I went to the 'Lion,' to find that the Miramars had not returned."

"You have not seen them, then?"

"No, it was so late, I put off my visit till to-morrow. They are sure to be very tired."

She looked at him again, half-curiously. He was aware of the look, and guessed what it meant. He had not forgotten the hint he had given, as to what his visit to-night might mean.

"You will excuse a cigarette, I am sure," he said amiably, "when you realise that I was going to bed when I discovered your note, and have hurried pipeless to your side."

Recognising a parry, Virginia might possibly avoid an unnecessary stroke, he felt more disinclined than ever for any allusion, however remote, to the subject that was occupying both their minds.

But her next words, so totally unexpected, were destined to crush out the hope. "Dolly has gone

to England. She left a note with me to give you directly you returned. That was the reason I wrote."

With the instinct of self-preservation under Virginia's eyes, he never looked up from the cigarette he was lighting. It meant something—something vital—he knew from her tones, her voice, the very attitude in which she stood; it was all-important at such a moment he should not betray himself, and it was almost impossible to prevent it, surprised and taken unawares as he was.

"Gone to England," he repeated, and then—"Give me the letter," he went on.

His voice betrayed what his averted eyes had hidden; the accustomed slight drawl had disappeared—it had something of the clear swiftness that distinguished his sister's.

He took the envelope in his hand, and walked over with it to a lamp, and there read it through. It did not take long, and when he had finished it he said, sharply—"You told her," looking straight into Virginia's eyes as he spoke.

Those were not the words he had meant to say; they had escaped him unadvisedly—the immediate correction showed he had recognised his mistake. "What did you say to her to make her take such a step?"

At his words Virginia drew nearer, till they stood close together, the light from the lamp taking them both into its circle, and for the moment accentuating

the likeness of the two clear profiles, cut sharply against the dark background, as they stood thus face to face.

"I told her nothing," Virginia answered, calmly, ignoring the correction. "She brought me that letter, and asked me to give it to you; she did not consult me, or ask my advice—her mind was made up."

That was the exact truth, he knew. It was impossible to associate Virginia Shore with the faintest shadow of a lie; she was far too courageous to fear the result of either word or action, moral fear was as impossible to her as physical, and Jerome knew that, as he looked steadily into the eyes that never flinched for a second.

A lie is often the result of a momentary impulse. The impulse has endowed the weak person with courage, and he finds himself in a position which he is not strong enough to hold—he cannot recall the strength which placed him there—a lie is the result.

Virginia was never impulsive; every word and act was the result of reflection, and in the hour of danger she was never surprised; she was strong in every position she held, and strength gives courage.

Knowing Jerome as she did, she had fully calculated the effect of the letter—a great deal depended on his immediate action.

"It was agreed," she said, quietly, "you will remember, between us, only last night, that I was *not* to interfere."

"I had forgotten," he muttered, but he recognised the shadowy reproof the words held.

The letter was still crumpled up in his hand; he smoothed it out, and laid it on the table.

"Read it," he said, hoarsely, "and tell me what you think."

It was very short; only a few lines in Dolores's round, schoolgirlish writing. Virginia lifted the sheet, and turning her back to her companion, stood where the lamplight fell upon it.

"DEAR CAPTAIN SHORE,—I have thought a great deal about what you said last night, and I don't think if I were to see you again I could explain—but I think you will understand.

"I don't think I could make you happy. I am going to England, back to my own home there, but first I am going to take this to Miss Shore to give to you. I cannot explain very well, but I do not want you to think I am ungrateful. No one has ever been as kind and good as you have been to me. I shall never forget it. Good-bye. DOLLY."

It did not certainly take long to read, but Virginia lingered, so as to gain time for reflection. Jerome's voice interrupted her.

"What do you think?" he repeated, coming and standing beside her, and glancing over her shoulder.

"I am justified at least," she replied. "Whoever

influenced her, it was not I. You can see that from her own words."

"Do you suspect any one else? Who?" he exclaimed, excitedly.

"I cannot imagine any one having sufficient interest in the case," she replied, tranquilly. "No, I should think——"

"What?"

His voice was still strangely stirred. She turned her head and looked straight into his eyes. "Even Dolly," she said, quietly, "is not, I suppose, a fool."

"I don't understand you. Say in plain words," as she remained silent, "what you mean."

She moved a step away, with the slightest possible shrug. "I am not your conscience," she said.

The words, to his pained, troubled consciousness, sounded like a taunt; the warmth and tenderness which never could be blotted out of his heart for his childish little love seemed crying out against the cruelty that had driven her to such a step—cruelty, that was the only word; forgotten were all these past months, in which he had fought against recognising the quality of the mistake he had made; forgotten this long past day in which he had fought and conquered the temptation to escape the consequences of it; no shadow of victory remained, only a sense of shameful defeat, which involved his own honour and truth, and all he held dear, and which had broken the heart of the child who had trusted in him.

He flung himself into the wide arm-chair, with a sigh that was almost a groan, and buried his face in his hands.

Virginia had grown so much accustomed to the manner in which Jerome avoided any probing into what he thought or felt, that it revealed to her the violence of this emotion, which did not even essay to hide itself from her. Nothing could have more surely proved its overmastering power, and with all her habitual clear-sightedness, even in that moment she recognised of what such emotion might render him capable.

She approached his side, but silently,—it was almost impossible to overestimate the importance of each word,—and seated herself on the arm of the chair, her presence at least was a sign of sympathy. As such he interpreted it, and a minute later, with a spontaneity of affection he had not evinced for her since he was a boy, he took her hands and held them clasped in his; there was no shadow of attempted disguise in the words that escaped him.

“There is nothing else to be done. I must follow her, see, speak to her, understand what has influenced her, be assured for myself what it means.”

It had come—this was exactly what she had foreseen; almost involuntarily she raised her eyes to those of the portrait on the easel, and encountered the smile she knew so well.

“The first thing to do,” she said quietly, “is to see the Countess Miramar, and learn from her what

the causes are that have led to this determination—they will be found in her own home, that at least is my opinion.”

Every word found its way clearly into his mind; he betrayed that to the speaker, he had dropped her hands, his eyes were once more hidden.

“She will either have told the Countess or written to her,” Virginia went on quietly, ignoring his movement, “and from her you may possibly learn the truth.”

He rose up as she ceased speaking. “You are quite right,” he said; “yes, of course, that is the first thing to do. I will go there now.”

He thrust Dolores’s letter into his pocket, and walked towards the door. Virginia accompanied him, walking by his side, and in the fashion that was familiar to him, he put his arm round her; there was in all his trouble and bewilderment a feeling of strength about her that was comforting.

“If it seems best,” he said slowly, “I shall go to England to-morrow.”

“It will not be best,” she answered.

“Why?”

“Not best, I mean,” she went on quietly, “for you, for her, for”—she paused—“for any one concerned.”

He flushed, though she did not look at him—her eyes were turned away.

“Dolly is wiser, she recognised that,” she added.

“Yes,” he cried, impetuously, “one cannot set

wrong right, one can only leave some one else to bear it."

It was a sudden flash which showed him the truth, it was ringing in his ears, as he went out into the night.

It seems an unjust law that the punishment is not always meted out to the wrong-doer, and yet, who knows, the heart alone knoweth its own bitterness. Dolores speeding away through the quiet country fields, looking her last towards the home where she had known so much happiness, thinking of the past without bitterness, the future with gentle tenderness; and Jerome Shore, with that consciousness of cruelty overburdening his heart towards the child who was so dear to him, that sense of having outraged her confidence and trust, of having fallen short of his own ideas of honour, loyalty, all he held most dear, it would not perhaps be hard to decide by whose side the avenging angel stood.

Left alone, Virginia walked back until she stood once more within view of the portrait on the easel.

"It is certainly most extraordinary"—the thought passing through her mind brought a faint smile—"that disinclination to avail himself of the help of circumstance! A kind fate interferes to save him at the eleventh hour, and instead of recognition and gratitude"—she lifted her arms with a gesture of exaggerated wonderment—"the immediate idea is a first-class ticket to London, to try and bring about

the former discomfort over again. It is useless to ask why it should be so, I suppose: there is no answer to that question; but, fortunately, without understanding their reason or want of reason, it is always easy to foresee what a man's actions will be."

So engrossed in thought was she, that the opening of the door passed unnoticed; a servant's voice roused her.

"His Excellency's compliments, and he wishes to know if you could receive him for a few minutes?"

In a moment her swift mind had grasped the new situation. Almost as quickly as she had said "Yes," she was wondering what circumstance could have caused such an unusual occurrence. Only one, she felt assured; it was no light, everyday business that brought him at such an hour. It was not difficult to guess what he had to say.

"It is very late," his Excellency began, as he entered the room—"later even than I thought," with a glance at the clock; "but you will excuse me, especially," smiling, "as I come as an ambassador."

"Sit down, Excellency, and don't make excuses, pray. What is going to become of me when you leave is a prospect I have not yet dared to face."

"Ah! but you will take my place." He looked at the photograph of Prince Waldenberg as he spoke.

"Our united talents"—she smiled too at his words—"I am afraid will not be considered a satisfactory exchange for yours."

"Miss Shore, your flattery is so soothing that I

am growing nervous as to what you can be going to ask from me. My only consolation is that I have so little to give."

"Thank you," Virginia returned. "It is a hint what to expect when I begin to observe those around flattering *me*. Hitherto"—she bent her graceful head towards him—"flattery has not often reached my ears."

"Is that true, I wonder?" He looked at her half seriously. "Yes, I expect it is, and I should not be surprised if it continued."

"Why, I wonder, do you say that?"

"Oh!" his Excellency retorted, more lightly, "because flattery is quite useless when it does not turn the head, or win the heart."

Virginia laughed.

"No; then we recognise our inferiority, and try to propitiate by other means. Fate sits on the hill-top with a cloud hiding her face, and we kneel in the dust, and wonder what she is thinking, and by humility and fear try to persuade her to overlook us. It is the best to be hoped from her! But I did not come," altering his voice, and speaking more seriously, "to prophesy, or utter parables. I came, as I said, as an ambassador."

"And having uttered the preliminaries——" Virginia interpolated, gently.

His Excellency smiled. "Just so, I come from the Princess. She especially wished me to see you to-night, if possible, to tell you." He paused. Vir-

ginia's clear eyes, which never left his face, somehow obliged that pause, and it was with a slight effort he went on—"She wishes me to tell that she has accepted an offer of marriage." Again he paused—a little smile, so slight as to be scarcely visible, except to eyes that knew it; a little, shadowy, mocking smile had crept into Virginia's eyes, was hovering at the corners of her mouth. Something in it roused in him that sensation, under which the Princess's fiery soul had so often writhed; he felt that the words that followed were not uttered with the calm impersonality of the ambassador, to whom he had likened himself, but with quick, angry defiance, straight from his own heart—"an offer of marriage from Prince Dorislaus Lescynski." The words sounded to his own ear defiant, as they died away in the silence that followed.

Virginia's eyes did not leave his; there was no exclamation, or even look of astonishment, and yet the words must have been unexpected. Only the smile slowly increased—that smile that the Princess knew and feared, gave an added clearness and intelligence to the eyes, curved into more distinct mockery the delicate lines of the mouth, seemed to give expression to her few words: "And one must congratulate, I suppose, Excellency." Behind the smile there was genuine amusement. "She was *afraid* to tell me!"

"Congratulations are always expected," he replied, quickly, "I suppose, under such circumstances."

"You will offer mine, though perhaps to-morrow I shall be able to do so myself. And this marriage," she added, directly, "will it make any difference to our present arrangements?"

"Yes. The Princess will go to Paris at once—I shall have the honour of taking her, and she hopes that you will accompany her."

"It will be a pleasure," Virginia replied, suavely. "I suppose there will be nothing to delay the marriage, it will take place shortly?"

"In the autumn, I expect," his Excellency answered,—he had grown quite calm again, and could now scarcely recall what had ruffled him in such unusual fashion,—"there is no reason for delay."

"None," Virginia assented. "It is only the conclusion of a long romance."

"And as a rule romances do not end well," his Excellency added.

"And this," there was almost an imperceptible question in the words, "you find has ended well?"

"From my point of view," he said, seriously, "yes."

"I wonder why?"

There was genuine interest in the voice, in the eyes turned towards him.

He was silent, for the simple reason that there seemed no answer to the question. Under the influence of her eyes, not a single word would come, which it seemed a child could not brush aside.

Yes, why? What, after all, was the cause of

satisfaction? On the one hand, a proud, ambitious, fiery-tempered woman, who never had brooked contradiction, probably never would, leaving a position in which every whim had been gratified, for a life of comparative retirement and poverty.

On the other, the man whom he loved best in the world entering on the uncertain happiness which marriage with such a woman must entail.

"Yes, why?" he found himself repeating aloud. "It is a question which really I do not feel able to answer, so I can only withdraw my remark."

"I was entitled to ask why, was I not?" Virginia questioned, gently.

"Certainly," he assented. "And I, not having an answer ready, am entitled to withdraw the words which led to it. I spoke unadvisedly."

"So rash, Excellency, and not like you."

"Ah, Miss Shore, I am entering into retirement; I can afford to be rash—on you my mantle falls—I bequeath it to you, and—it is *not* flattery, I assure you, I have nothing to gain and nothing to lose—but I believe you will wear it far more gracefully than I have ever done."

She stood up and made him a deep curtsy.

"Treasured words, Excellency," clasping her hands to her heart, "they shall never be forgotten; they will be armour against any other criticism."

She was in evening dress, made high to her throat, and down to her wrists, through the transparent black of which her arms and neck gleamed

whitely, it was cut rather low in the neck, the soft black just a faint outlying shadow, from which rose the slender throat; close round, fitting tightly to the throat, was a string of pearls fastened with a diamond clasp; no other ornament, save the one great betrothal ring on her finger, which caught the light as she clasped her hands; in the straight simplicity of her gown, her figure seemed taller and slenderer than ever.

As she curtsied thus, bending towards him, with that willowy grace, which yet was typical of strength, he recognised her wonderful fascination, her grace and beauty. He was back again on the familiar footing of admiration, and somehow he felt relieved.

"No, do not go," she said, as she sat down again, and he made a movement as if to rise, "tell me more, if it is permitted. Where is Prince Lescynski? I thought he had disappeared into space."

"He is at the 'Three Crowns,' but to-night he returns to England."

"The same hotel as that at which Jerome is staying," Virginia commented.

Unheeding of the inuendo in the words, "Tell me about Jerome," his Excellency asked. "When is the marriage to take place? is anything settled?"

She was silent a moment, and then, "Excellency," she said, "you are an old friend; you know most things, whether they are told to you or not. Dolly left to-day, and has gone to England."

"You speak so seriously that I am obliged to suppose you mean it seriously. What is her reason?"

"She has given no reasons—at least none of a definite kind. She wrote to Jerome, but she consulted with no one."

His Excellency was silent, buried in thought.

"It is very odd," he said then, "what could have happened since yesterday?"

"Why do you say since yesterday?"

"Because I saw her then alone, and with Jerome, and there was apparently no cloud, no misunderstanding of any sort."

"No!" Virginia uttered no further comment or reflection. She knew it was better to say something. Facts were always safe things to talk about; but suspicions, which in her own heart *were* facts, were better kept out of sight.

"Did you see her?" his Excellency questioned.

"Yes; she came here and brought me a letter to give to Jerome. She is a sweet child," Virginia added the words with sincerity, "but, Excellency, it would not have been at all a suitable marriage."

"And Miss Shore never approved of it."

At the suggestion in the words, Virginia coloured faintly.

"No, I never approved of it," she answered, "because I know them both, and I could foresee what a few years of such a marriage would end in. Jerome is a kind-hearted, clever, spoilt man of the

world, Dolly a simple schoolgirl, who in a few years would have no hold on anything but his kindness, and every one knows what that is to trust to."

"Miss Shore, do not you think," his Excellency interposed, suavely, "that you are overlooking the fact that we cannot be happy in each other's way?"

"No, Excellency." She rose up and stood in front of him as she spoke. "It is on that fact my argument is founded. Jerome will never be happy in Dolly's way, nor Dolly in his. You think," she went on, smiling down at him—if she had been ruffled for a moment, she was quite calm again now, as she stood there, her hands lightly clasped—"you think, I see, that I have separated them, perhaps been scheming for it all along. My dear Excellency, how little you know me. I am not a jealous sister. I am not jealous of Dolly's influence. I think Jerome would be better married. He is," and she laughed a little, "one of those amiable, good-looking men who are safer in some one's guardianship. If he had come to me and said, 'It is a mistake, help me to escape,' I should have helped him; but as, on the contrary, he was always asserting that he was perfectly happy, I had not the slightest"—she hesitated for a word—"temptation to interfere."

"Most women," his Excellency observed as she paused, "would have interfered from love of interference."

She gave her shoulders that tiny shrug with which he was so familiar.

"If interference," there was a swift, unusual ring of bitterness in her voice, "would have made him see the future as I see it, possibly I should have been tempted."

"You are a wise woman, Miss Shore, as I have always known, and often said. Such wisdom," he added, "deserves, and probably will receive, its reward."

But when his Excellency had said good night and left her, the little tone of bitterness had quite disappeared; it was not of Jerome she was thinking, but of the piece of news she had just heard. It had astonished her, if astonishment is the right word for expressing the sensation of hearing the unexpected.

But there was such rapidity of action in her brain, such a curious swiftness by which she could receive, arrange, adjust, and criticise new circumstances, that the few first words, giving the key to those which were to follow, instead of leaving a blank space filled up with surprise, as is so often the case, merely found her the following minute reviewing the whole as a whole. It was an extraordinary power of grasping a situation as a whole, which she had inherited from the fair-featured Englishman with the enigmatical smile, to whom she so often turned, as if for inspiration.

The Princess then, for some reasons which probably she would never learn, had agreed, after these stormy months of doubt and longing, to vacate the possibilities that the future had held, and had chosen

banishment or whatever it might be called, and—Dorislaus. She could not understand it; but Virginia Shore never wasted time in attempting to understand motives. She saw results, she recognised what had probably happened. Dorislaus had somehow obtained an interview, and had gained her promise through the strength of those passionate feelings, which, though held in check, yet always burnt so fiercely in her soul.

It was impossible to understand, because there was no corresponding power of recognising the feeling; but here was the result, and that was all that mattered.

“That leaves the field clear to me,” she said, and she smiled, looking at her own graceful reflection in the glass. “For me it is better, as her beauty and position would of course have overshadowed me, and now I shall at least reign alone. I do not believe *he* will ever marry now, at least it is very improbable, and if he did, no other woman could overshadow me as completely, as in that position the Princess, from association as well as fact, would always have done. I am ambitious, of course—one must know and recognise what one is and wants; I have no thoughts of which I am ashamed—I want nothing; it is the power itself I want—it is the delightful sense of security which I suppose is felt by the possessors of great physical strength. If Jerome,” her cold eyes softened, “if only Jerome were happy, I have nothing left to wish for.”

Driving home, his Excellency's thoughts did not quit the woman he had left. "Yes, she deserves success," thinking of his last words, "a woman who neither interferes nor offers advice."

And yet he did not smile at the picture conjured up, but saw again in the darkness the little soft-eyed girl who had been by his side yesterday afternoon, the lingering, loving looks he had so often intercepted, bent on the blond-haired man opposite.

"What had come between them? Who had killed the girl's happiness?"

Not Virginia, of that he was convinced, though for half a moment he had doubted, but no one could ever hear Virginia speak and doubt one hair's-breadth deviation from the truth. Since she had condescended to explain, doubt was no longer possible. "Such a trifle as a girl's happiness, or even a man's love," he thought bitterly, "momentary weaknesses which pass, leaving no trace behind, would not have been worth the destroying—their hours are numbered; from the moment of flowering, there are only so many moments before they fade—it is such a pity that no one, except Virginia, has found it out. No," he smiled as he walked up-stairs, "no, not that, we have all found it out, but Virginia is the only one of us who makes a practical use of the knowledge."

In the drawing-room Prince Lescynski was awaiting him, standing by the open window looking out

over the garden, in which scarcely a leaf stirred in the moonlight.

"I have been waiting for you," he said, as the old man uttered an exclamation of surprise. "I wished to say good-bye to you, so, directly I left the Palace, I determined to come here and wait. You have seen her" — with a quick change of tone — "told her?"

"Yes, seen her and told her," his Excellency repeated.

"What did she say?" as he added nothing more.

"Really, I cannot remember that she said anything. She smiled, and she offered congratulations; is not that what is usually done on such occasions?"

"Well, I am glad you told her," the young man said, "it was kind of you. The Princess was very anxious not to have to tell her herself, though I cannot think why."

"Cannot you," asked his Excellency, a little satirically. "Virginia has the unenviable faculty of making us all feel a little ashamed of ourselves."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing that need annoy you, because when she makes us feel ashamed of ourselves, it is for something that it is not customary to condemn; it is only painful to find her discovering the flaws in our scheme of happiness."

The old man sat down.

"Never mind her," Dorislaus said, his voice once more calm, "leave her her scheme of happiness, I am

sure I do not envy her, she is quite welcome to her own views—tell me instead——”

“The worst of it is, my dear boy,” the old man interrupted, “that, as far as I can see, her scheme of happiness, of which you speak so lightly, is the only one that holds the slightest chance of success. Twenty years hence, when *all of you*”—with a slight wave of his hand,—“are mourning over your unfulfilled hopes, or your past joys, Virginia Waldenberg will be enjoying life as keenly as she does to-day,—radiant and smiling, with no outward griefs or inward troubles, happy and successful, with the world at her feet.”

“You don’t think all that,” the young man laid his slender brown hand with a quick, boyish movement on to the wrinkled white one.

“I do not *think*, I *know*, and for this reason,—all of you are risking something,—and Virginia nothing. For all of you, there is one unturned card, which may mean,—well, anything; she does not play till she has read all her adversaries’ cards.”

“But,” there was something pleading in Dorislaus’s low voice, his hand impulsively touching the other’s coat-sleeve,—“if one is unwilling to risk anything, one gives up the chance of winning.”

“Just so,” the old man assented grimly. “Heaven or hell may depend on the turn of a card,—but Miss Shore wants neither, she wants this pleasant, agreeable, familiar earth, with nothing queer or unexplained.”

At the quick, passionate sigh that followed his words, he looked with vague pity into the haggard young face and dark eyes, which always that shadow of sorrow haunted, and Miss Shore's question came back to his mind.

"If he had had her courage," he found himself thinking, "he would have feared nothing, that should have kept these two apart."

His straying thoughts returned, perhaps through the consciousness of that sigh, that touch on his arm, and looking down for the first time, he noted the absence of the narrow iron ring which he had grown accustomed to associate with that slender brown hand. His look must have been more significant than he had intended for, "I have left it with her," Dorislaus said, "it was the only thing I had of any value to leave."

CHAPTER XLII.

“Time does not work till we have ceased to watch him.”

It was raining a little, in addition there was a touch of east wind, which lent added dreariness as Dolores, by the Professor's side, drove through the familiar roads and smoky villages, which lay between the station and Beverley Hall.

From France Herr Laurentius had telegraphed his intended arrival, and at Dolores's request had added that she was accompanying him. She was nervously anxious about the reception she might expect, at any rate it was better that there should be no surprise or secrecy; but when by the Professor's side she entered the well-remembered room, where her fate had been decided—between physical weariness and mental anxiety she felt unable to explain her appearance.

The same Elinor Russell rose to greet their entrance, the same, though perhaps a trifle stouter, a trifle greyer; to Dolores it so vividly recalled that other day three years ago, that it was impossible to realise the gap of time.

"The scheme has failed," the Professor's gruff voice was the first to break the silence—"failed," with a wave of his hand to where Dolores stood, "so I have brought her back."

Poor Dolores. It certainly was an embarrassing method of introduction, but she did not mind really, or fear, the Professor's words half as much as Miss Russell's questioning silence.

The whirr of the train was still in her ears, her head aching with want of sleep and incessant noise and excitement. The eyes she lifted to Miss Russell perhaps betrayed something of all this, for she held closer the hand she had taken, and kissed the girl's cheek.

"Failed," the Professor repeated, glaring furiously round; "not her fault," taking her other hand and patting it, "but the fault of a lot of interfering, idle, lazy women, who had nothing better to do than mischief—and—— Well, here she is, and here she must stay——"

The words arrested Dolores's tired senses, yes, that was another side of the question that she had almost overlooked. That was the truth, she had nowhere to go—she had given up the Trahernes, it was not to be expected she could return to them, she had foreseen that in leaving them, though she had overlooked it now, and in her trouble had turned naturally towards that home of her childhood. She was very tired, she felt the slow tears forcing their way into her eyes; she did not doubt Miss Russell

would be kind, perhaps generous,—but it would be generosity, not right; perhaps for the first time in all her life was borne into Dolores's mind the sense of her loneliness.

Miss Russell saw and noted the approach of tears; she was also very curious, and quite sure that there would be no reticence on the part of Herr Laurentius,—all he knew would be at her service. “Of course you brought her here, Professor,” she strove to stop the stream of words. “Of course——”

“She is to stay,” the Professor repeated, his voice rising again; “all is not over yet—she has a voice, she shall succeed, I, Ludwig Laurentius, have said it before, now I say it again. She shall sing, I will hear her and judge.”

“My dear Professor, you talk so loud that I am obliged to insist upon being heard. Let the poor child wash off the dust of her journey, and have something to eat before she is forced to discuss her future.”

Then having given the girl into the charge of a maid, she returned to her other visitor.

“Now tell me,” she said, “what is the matter?”

“How do I know,” he retorted. “You take her away from kind people who look after her, you give her to idle, wicked people of the world, who pretend they are her mother, who say later on they are not; who promise her a home, and then make her go away; who promise to marry her, and leave her to break her heart,—is not that enough? Well, here

she is, and here she stays now with you, or—she comes away with me, even if I have to marry a wife to look after her.”

Miss Russell laughed.

“No, Professor, I will spare you that,—she shall stay with me. I have now arrived at the age when I want a daughter, she has come at the right moment.”

“And she shall go on learning, she shall be an artiste yet; our plan, though it has failed, was a good one, a very good one!”

“Yes,” Miss Russell assented, drily, “only I think we should have taken another girl.”

“Another girl?” the Professor repeated, stormily. “Why? She is a good girl, a pretty girl, a nice girl, and with a voice,—yes, there is no doubt about the voice. No, it is your worldly, foolish ladies and idle men that have spoiled her career! Spoiled? What do I mean by spoiled? She shall succeed, and make them all silly nobodies before her.”

In the midst of this tornado, the door opened, and Dolores ventured in.

She looked a little nervously from one to the other, but Miss Russell rose at once and said, kindly, “We were talking of you, Dolores. The Professor says he has brought you to stay with me. It is my turn now”—and she held both her hands—“to adopt you, and I shall not let you escape from me.”

“I ought,” Dolores faltered, “to be able to earn my own living now, I have had a great many chances.

I *have* learnt a great deal"—she looked from one to the other with one of those sweet, shy smiles that had won so many hearts—"but I am not very clever, I do not think I should succeed, even if I only tried to teach."

"You say such words as those again,"—the Professor had risen, and the great spectacles were pushed in his excitement so far up his forehead that they had almost disappeared in his fierce bushy hair,—
"you say such words and I commit my threat—I marry, and you come and live with me."

"The Professor's threats are terrible," Miss Russell observed. "Fortunately you can come and live with me, Dolly, without drawing down such an evil fate on *my* head; so it is better as it is."

There must have been some tender, subtle charm that Dolores possessed, that won for her so much affection from so many varied people; that gave her a champion against the world in stout, warm-hearted Herr Laurentius, and rendered her dear to Charles Desprez, and to his daughter; that made it impossible for Jerome Shore ever to forget, or wish to forget his child-love, and that brought no mocking laugh, or quick biting word to his sister's swift tongue; that made all who knew her wish to shelter, and keep her out of the storms of the world. Perhaps the charm was just her own tender, loving heart, and the fresh, unconscious innocence and faith which saw no evil, and feared none. Innocence and faith and love, even in this unsatisfactory world, can

still do much, can still almost attain to the accomplishment of miracles.

But of all those she had known and cared for, there was one who never left Dolores's thoughts for a moment; one who, in these past days, had usurped more thought than even Jerome—one, whose first written words she hoped for, even more than for his.

They would both write, she had no doubts; they would answer those few, troubled lines she had left—the man she had loved, the girl who had been her sister; she had no doubts, the letters would come, but it was Marie's reproaches she feared most. She might not understand, and might accuse her of unkindness, ingratitude, Jerome, she felt assured, would understand.

It had been a long day of waiting. "No, a letter could not come till to-morrow; there was no afternoon post at Beverley—besides, they might not write the first day."

She was thinking it out as she drove home in Miss Russell's pony-carriage from the Parsonage. That was where she had passed the day, and she had discovered that which is so hard to realise, how impossible it is to resume people where we left them off. It was all so different, in some queer, inexplicable way, from what she remembered. They were just the same kind people she had left; they had kissed and welcomed her, and asked a great many questions, and had blamed no one when she said that she had wished to leave the Miramars, so

Herr Laurentius had brought her to Miss Russell. She had rather feared blame for conduct which she could not easily explain.

"I daresay it is better, now the Countess has found her own daughter," Mrs Traherne remarked, "but she always wrote very kindly about you, Dolly, and she has done a great deal for you."

"Indeed, yes," Dolores agreed, "I have had lessons in everything."

"Then are you going to teach?" Mrs Traherne questioned.

She said it very kindly, and immediately added, "You know, Dolly, if I had my own way, I should be glad to have you back—you are just like my other children." But she shook her head sorrowfully.

"It is very hard," she said, more vehemently than she usually spoke; "but I do not see how we are even going to keep our own girls at home. They must go out as governesses, I suppose, and yet what they are to teach I do not know: they have had very little chance of learning anything!"

Perhaps in the speech was some unexplained furtive jealousy, roused at the sight of Dolores in her simple perfect dress, the nameless stamp of expense and fashion on all she wore, the elegance and grace which characterised her movements, the something which she had gained from the training she had had.

Nothing would ever give her a shadow of Virginia Shore's distinction; but in this country vicarage, where Miss Russell in her handsome black

silks, which only varied imperceptibly from one year to another, Dolores's French toilettes and exquisitely fitting gloves and boots were worthy of note.

"Dear mother"—Dolores kissed the pale withered cheek—"you are sure to be rewarded—good people always are. If it had not been for you, think of what I should have been! Oh, there must be some way in which I can help you!"

Mrs Traherne brushed away one tear that had stolen on to her pale cheek. "You deserve your luck, Dolly," she said, kindly. You were always a good obliging little girl; I shall always love you. Your marriage," she asked presently—"is that to be soon?"

"It is broken off," Dolores answered steadily; and at the exclamation of surprise—"No, there was no special reason, but we were not very well suited to each other. I do not think"—she faltered a little—"we should have been happy. I did not write," she went on; "I thought I would wait and tell you, but *afterwards* it was not very comfortable staying there."

It was almost as easy to make explanations to Mrs Traherne as to Charles Desprez. She kissed the girl and said, "Oh, you were quite right, dear—an unhappy marriage must be terrible misery." She asked no questions: the whole thing was unreal to her, and consequently not very important; at any rate, there were many other matters of greater

importance, — Jem's delinquencies — they had not assumed less proportions with the passing of time — and the curate. "Yes, Dolly, we are obliged to have a curate," and Mrs Traherne sighed again. "Your papa has grown much less active; don't you notice it?"

It was strange to Dolores to think of insignificant commonplace Mr Traherne as papa, and yet for fourteen years she had so addressed him; and yes, certainly, he was much older, greyer, than she remembered him.

The trite saying that there is a great deal of trouble in the world seized hold of her with fresh meaning; and afterwards, when she walked round the garden with Martha and Mary, and listened to their endless histories of the curate's misdeeds, and papa's anxieties and expenses, she felt a sort of pity for the narrow horizon—at least, if assured home-love was theirs, something had been given to her, the memory of which she would not willingly part with.

"And if Jem had not been so obstinate and selfish"—Mary sighed—"he would have been here helping papa."

Dolores fancied Martha blushed a little; perhaps she had grown more observant—at least in one particular line—as she said, "But, Mary, he is very generous—Jem, I mean; he often sends home money, and it would have been a pity, I think, if Mr Austin had not come. He does not quite understand papa's

ways yet," she explained to Dolores, "but he is very earnest and good——"

"Looking," Mary added, with a faint twinkle in her eyes, and Dolores was sure of it now; Martha certainly blushed.

They were dull, uninteresting, good, kind girls, but after all they were girls, with the same hopes and fears as others. She spent a happy afternoon with them listening to their once familiar talk.

But driving home, it was once more of Marie she was thinking; her charm and tenderness, the loving demonstrative affection for which she longed, and always the haunting fear that she might have misunderstood, might come to associate her departure with some kind of ingratitude.

"There is a visitor waiting for you, Miss," the staid butler began, as he opened the door; but he got no further. A door in the distance was open, there was the quick sound of hurrying feet down the passage, a vision of a slight grey-clad figure, and Marie's arms were round her, her kisses falling fast on her cheeks.

"O Dolores!"—there was a sob in the words—"how could you go away without saying good-bye to me! Why did you do it? Tell me, tell me! Come—where can we go? Are you glad to see me?"

"Glad!" Dolores repeated, as the girl paused for breath; "I never was so glad before in all my life, I think. I have been afraid——"

"Afraid! I should think so! Did you not love me, Dolores,"—her arm was round her neck; she turned Dolores's head a little towards her, and looked wonderingly into her eyes,—“did not you love me, that you could go away like that?”

"I loved you so much," Dolores answered, "that I do not think I could have gone, if I had said good-bye."

They were mounting the stairs, but Marie's arm did not leave its hold of the other girl; "You will tell me what it means—what had happened?"

"Nothing had happened," Dolores answered steadily. "Come, this is my room, come in."

"Yes, so they told me, so I have asked to be put in the dressing-room, that I may be close to you, Dolores, because you must never, never try to run away from me again. I have not brought any of your things, because you are going straight back with me to-morrow," and as Dolores made no rejoinder, she stood in front of her, and threw both arms round her neck. "You know mother and I cannot get on without you."

Still Dolores did not speak.

"Were you unhappy?"

"Yes."

"You will tell me why—your own sister, Dolores. I love you so," the sweet impetuous voice went on, "I would do anything to make you happy. You know that, do you not? then tell me what to do."

But Dolores only shook her head sadly.

"No, you can do nothing," she said, gently. "You would, I know, if you could, but it is not possible."

"Dolores," Marie took the girl's hands in hers, "tell me this, why did you write that letter to Captain Shore?"

"Did he show it to you?" There was a little nervous fear in the question, prompted by the thought of those badly written lines she had committed to Virginia's keeping.

"No, but he told us, my mother rather, that you wrote to him, and said 'Good-bye,' why—you will tell me that?"

Again Dolores shook her head.

"Were you not happy?"

"Yes; but—I could not make him happy."

"But why do you say that, he loves you."

"Yes," Dolores assented, gently, "he loves me, I am sure of that, but I want—I do not know how to explain it," she ended abruptly. "I should like," she went on directly, "for him to be quite happy, as happy as he could possibly be."

"But if you love him," Marie urged.

"When you go back," Dolores said, "will you go to him and say this: 'Has Dolly the power to make you quite happy?'" her eyes were grave and sweet as she spoke. Marie's met her steadily. "If he says 'Yes' to you," she ended gently, "you will tell me, and I will come back."

"You must love me," Marie said, "or you would not trust me with your message, would you?"

"You know how I love you, Marie; it has comforted me to see you. I have been very, very unhappy."

And the comfort remained, the sting somehow had gone, that fear of being misunderstood at any rate need no longer be dreaded. There was great gain in that.

"When I go back——" they were seated now side by side on the large old-fashioned sofa; with the similarity that the same dresses and the same colouring gives, it was as if the dissimilarity was the more strongly marked.

Marie's small brilliant face, the colour under the vivacious eyes, the beautiful curves of the scarlet mouth, the soft rings of hair on her forehead, the disordered curls on her small graceful head; and Dolores with the pretty colour that came and went so quickly, and the shy eyes under the black bar of her straight brows, and her smooth sleek head, with the thick hair that just waved a little on either side of the straight parting, and was plaited simply round her head.

"If you do not return with me," Marie said, "Captain Shore will come and see you himself; he would have come now,"—her voice gathered steadiness as she went on,—"but I wanted so much to see you, I was so unhappy, that mother let Elise bring me."

"It was much better. I have longed to see you," Dolores's voice shook. "But, Marie," with unusual demonstrativeness she flung her arms round the other

girl's neck, and with her face thus hidden, "but, Marie, do not let him come; I mean, I do not wish to see him, it would only make us both very unhappy. I have nothing to say—I said 'good-bye' in the letter. If I thought he were coming," lifting her head, "I would run away again."

"I will ask mother to tell him," Marie answered, "only, Dolores, I think if you saw him, spoke to him, he would explain——"

"But there is nothing to explain," Dolores insisted. "He has always been so good and kind to me that it would pain me to see him, and *say* good-bye."

"But then, why say it," Marie urged once more. But when Dolores only gently repeated, "It is best," in that quiet voice, there seemed nothing further to offer.

"I am to meet my mother in Paris," she said. She added nothing else, but Dolores knew somehow that Jerome would be there also, that his intention was to come and bid her explain herself. She knew with one word he would come, loyally determined to make her happy, and she knew also how easily he would push aside her doubts and scruples, and in his well-meaning attempt to render her happy, listen to none of her hesitating words.

But Dolores's strong sense of rectitude, which admitted of no wavering half-measures, taught her what was best, and insisted on her doing it. The somewhat old-fashioned, commonplace teaching of

the old English parsonage had its influence now. "An unhappy marriage," as Mrs Traherne said, "was a terrible misfortune, one to be escaped from at any price; and a happy marriage was the result of love, and it was very fortunate to find out in time, instead of too late that it would have been a mistake."

Jerome Shore had told no lies; he had always been fond of her; somehow a little light had enabled her to read the past very clearly. He was fond of her now, she hoped he always would be, but—it was not love, not the love that in such a case he should have had. He had found it out, and—so had she; she did not say "Alas!"—she said bravely, and felt it, "that she was very thankful." There was no modern tiresome complexity in Dolores's nature to help her to argue a way of escape for herself; it was a wound, a sharp, painful wound; she was unhappy, as she said herself, but she did not fret and worry in addition, or turn restlessly towards any form of excitement, in the hope of deadening the pain.

There had been a wish to see him, but almost immediately her own common-sense had told her of the folly of such a wish; a momentary relief, perhaps, but how much it would undo she felt, as she recognised how futile any attempt at explanation on her part would be. And with all her tenderness and sweetness, there was no false sentimentality about Dolores: the great step had been taken, she

had said good-bye, seen him for the last time, another meeting would only be recalling trouble, and adding to the painful moments she had known. And in addition to her own pain she would be adding to his, for she knew that though he might feel she was right, he would not allow that she was. Perhaps Dolores's secret charm was unselfishness. The little ambassadress went away, and Dolores waited—waited without hope she said, for the letter that she felt assured would now come—the letter which would mean the end of that chapter of her life.

It is hard to say though when hope is really dead. Dolores's heart gave a great suffocating jump, when, returning from a stroll in the garden a couple of days later, it was to be told a gentleman was in the drawing-room with Miss Russell, who had come to see her.

“It was impossible—impossible,” she said, as she turned the handle, and yet was conscious of a wave of disappointment when she recognised Prince Dorislaus Lescynski.

“Prince Lescynski has come to see us from London, Dolly,” Miss Russell said, as she entered the room, whilst Dolores stood trying to realise that there was no cause for disappointment; “he has come from London, and is going to spend the day here, I am glad to say; I will leave you to have a little talk with him,—he has a message for you,—and then we will all meet presently for tea in the garden.”

Miss Russell left the room, so saying. Dolores had told her very little; she answered questions, but Miss Russell was disinclined to put questions. She had known the Shores for years, Virginia, especially well, and perhaps, as was natural, she was inclined to judge the brother by the sister. The prospect of such a marriage was folly she felt in her own heart; if she had been asked, she would have summed up very much as Virginia had done, but she was a good-hearted woman, and sensible in her self-opinionated way.

“Leave the girl alone for the present; let her realise that really everything was over, and then take her away, and interest and amuse her.” And the prospect did not displease.

“I am growing tired of solitude; it will add something to my life to have a girl to look after, especially a girl with such a talent.”

For, with the Professor, it was to Dolores's talent that her eyes turned, as the solution of the difficulty.

The woman who had never married, but who had seized and steered her own destiny through rather troubled waters, to such good harbourage, was apt to consider any love-troubles as merely sentimental, which would be outlived in time.

And then, Miss Russell looked forward to the satisfaction it would be to her Bohemian tastes to have constituted herself the guardian of such a girl, the interest and delight, the half-hold upon her,

the certain companionship, in the triumphant days that were coming.

Every girl fancies herself in love at some time, the younger the better ; it will be an added spur to ambition.

Dolores had acquired a good deal in this year, she was much more at her ease, certainly ; still, in the presence of this man, a great deal of her childish shyness returned.

There was something productive of shyness in the quiet reserve, perhaps, also, something in the memories he evoked. They all rushed back on her as he sat there talking ; little as she had seen him, few words as she had exchanged with him, he was somehow connected with each crisis in her fate.

He was to marry the Princess, so much she had been told by Marie Adios ; this one fact lifted him out of the region of everyday life into an enchanted fairyland, and it was with interest, mingled with a little awe, that she found herself looking at the thin worn face, the passionate dark eyes, which, even to her childish mind, seemed to carry in their depths some strange, hidden tragedy.

"The Princess has written to me," this was what he was saying, "and has told me that Miss Shore tells her you are in England ; she had wished to send you a picture of her little child, which she thought you would like to have."

"How kind of her to think of it," Dolores cried. "Oh, she knew how I should value it."

"As you had left, she sent it to me, and asked me to take it to you."

As he spoke he opened a little parcel, and placed in her hand a miniature in a quaint old gold frame. And out of the frame looked at her the beautiful child-face, just as she remembered it in all its vigour and brilliance. The vivid blue eyes, the gold-touched curls, the odd mixture of gravity, and the gaiety of childhood, the artist had caught and quickened into life every charm.

She did not speak, she did not even cry; she gave one quickly caught breath, which was nearly a sob, and she was aware of the sympathy in the man's grave voice.

"Because you loved him, the Princess wished you to have it; and he cared for your love, he often spoke of you, and asked after you."

"He was the dearest child and the most beautiful I ever saw," Dolores answered, simply. "I could never forget him; I am so very glad to possess such a treasure."

"And you have left," he said, perhaps for the sake of saying something, and then reproached himself as he saw the quick, troubled colour burn into her cheeks.

"Yes," she said, hesitatingly, "I am going to stay with Miss Russell and work at my music."

"I was very disappointed to find you had left before I had an opportunity of seeing you to thank you——"

She had almost forgotten her mission in the personal trouble and change that had succeeded, but his words brought back the memory of that which had escaped her.

"I hope it all came right," she said. "The Princess was so kind. Did your friend go?" she added, as he did not say anything.

For that minute he paused, half in doubt. She must know, must have guessed at least; but it was impossible to mistake the frankness of Dolores's eyes, lifted now to his in honest, questioning interest.

"You did not think,—no, why should you,"—he stood up as he spoke, and came a little nearer,—
"that it was for myself I was speaking? I was in despair," as Dolores gave a wondering, startled sigh, "I wished to see her, and it seemed impossible. I was fortunate in my messenger."

"No, I never thought," Dolores began. Words, questions rushed to her, but with them half-memories, rumours, vague rumours which had been in the air, and which, knowing little, she had not attended to, but which now came flooding with light his words, his actions. She was silent from very fear as to what she ought to say or leave unsaid.

The cause of her silence he probably read in her bewildered eyes; Dolores's thoughts were always very easy of translation.

"My messenger was successful," he said; "and I am glad to think," with that smile which only seemed to intensify the gravity of his eyes, "that

my happiness should have come through such trustworthy hands."

"Did you know," — somehow Dolores, without thought or intention, found herself standing up looking at him, speaking in quick tones that surprised herself,—“that before, when you were at Ehrenberg, and I saw you there, and you told me not to say that I had seen you, not let it be known that I had——”

And as he shook his head—

"I want you to know," she went on—"I want you to understand that I did not mean to tell; it was because I was stupid and could think of nothing to say when she asked me."

"She—who?" he questioned.

"The Princess; she asked me, and I could not think of what I ought to say."

"And what did you say?"

"That I had been told not to tell." The words were very low; the saying of them, the picturing of that scene, brought back so much that had depended on it—followed on it. "It was the same as saying I had seen you, but I could think of nothing else. It made me very unhappy," she said, in the momentary silence that had followed, "but I would rather you knew."

He took her slight hand in his, and kissed it.

"I am quite sure," he said, "whatever you did or said was best; your heart would not misdirect you. I am quite ready to abide by its decision. You

know," he went on, still holding her hand, "that I am going to marry the Princess? Well, when I tell you that I like to think I owe the only happiness my life has ever known to you, you will understand, will you not, how highly I trust you? Do you remember," he asked, as they walked out into the garden, "the Crusader's tomb in the chapel where we made you wait for us?"

"Yes; and the words written on his tomb."

Again the tears were very near, as Dolores's thoughts flew back to Jerome's interpretation of them—"Life is a sturdy foe."

"You have not forgotten them," Dorislaus said, a different sound they had in his ears now. "Life is a sturdy foe," he repeated, a thrill of triumph in his voice. "Well, I have fought life up till now, and conquered, and you have been my ally."

With a little wonderment Dolores looked up at the triumphant tones of the voice, and saw the passionate glow in the eyes which his own words had brought there. She did not understand—how could she? there was nothing in her own life, probably never would be, to interpret for her. Another woman might have felt reflectively what he felt, and have recognised the strong, passionate nature which had fought every inch of the way through life, and sighed perhaps to hear the exultant tones which said, "I have conquered."

Character creates incident; for such a man, it does not do to prophesy that the hour of peace has

struck. The grass may grow, and the tender spring flowers bloom on the rugged sides of Etna, but time does not alter its character—the secret of its power lies within.

It does not always rain even in Staffordshire. The east wind had ceased to blow, the old walled garden was pleasant and sheltered, and to Prince Lescynski that afternoon was ever after a pleasant memory.

Miss Russell, always clever and amusing, entertained him with her talk, and Dolores sat there in the silence which was habitual to her, only speaking when addressed, or when Miss Russell left them alone. Once when she had gone to give some order, Dolores turned to him directly with a question. “I have been thinking—I ought perhaps—to write and thank the Princess, but I am afraid—I write so badly,” she stopped short.

“But you *will* write,” he said, gently; “she will not criticise, she will only be glad to hear that you are pleased;” and Dolores sighed, but said, “I will try.”

Later, when it grew chilly, and they went indoors, she sang for them. She was no longer nervous when she sang; training and work had accomplished so much, and she gave them of her best. The rich fresh voice flooded the room, floating away in the distance, clear and pure as the notes of a bird; even Miss Russell was moved to outspoken admiration.

“Dolly, Dolly,” she exclaimed, half-wonderingly,

half-bitterly, "why have you no ambition—is that what you need? Why, it rests with yourself to have the world at your feet."

"You are pleased, satisfied," the ever ready colour flying into the girl's cheeks. "It is the only way to thank you," she added, "because it is to you I owe it all."

"My dear child, we all have our whims; fortunately I am generally able to gratify mine—and a great many others have had a share in the work."

"But you made it possible," Dolores insisted, gently.

"Well, well, as your voice is the result, I am willing to accept the responsibility—now sing something more."

And when Dorislaus echoed the entreaty, she stood up again by the piano. This time she sang some of the strange, weird music of Antoine Lütz's masterpiece.

It was curious; but unlike as the music was to anything she was in the habit of singing, she seemed to interpret it more faithfully than any other singer who attempted it; perhaps in those slow, sad months in which the composer had been fighting his hand-to-hand fight with death, something of the spirit of his work had passed into the girl who had sat by his side, and had known the struggles of his unhappy life.

Miss Russell was a brilliant pianiste, and rendered with exquisite taste the setting of the song: it was

a pleasure to Dolores to listen. It was a bit out of a scene at a masked ball, where, in the midst of some quaint, oddly marked dances, there suddenly found its way a hush, and an affrighted break, as the whisper ran through those assembled that the "Grey Lady" was walking.

Curiosity, mingled with superstitious awe, touching the careless dancers; terror striking a cold shiver to the heart of the Princess, who loved too well, and, alas! doubted too much, not to fear even a shadowy dread; and to the Prince, with the fatal knowledge of his treachery, the fatal knowledge of what the secret was that was hidden under the veil of the "Grey Lady." Standing there amid the glitter of the ballroom, the scents and lights, waiting for the moment which should take him out yonder to where she waited for him—and the Princess waited too—thinking she would know, where before she had only feared, and whilst behind their masks, which symbolised gaiety, the one thus hoped and the other feared—through the quaint, gay rhythm of the dance music rang out the passionate cry of the other woman waiting yonder amid the shadows of the trees, which no lightest breeze stirred, safely hidden under the shelter of the veil, from which all careless, happy eyes were so swiftly averted.

There was silence when she had finished, and it was after a few moments that Miss Russell said, critically, as she rose and left the piano: "Yes, it

is a wonderful bit of music; but notwithstanding its frame, which I suppose is meant to represent yesterday, it is not the music of yesterday. The clear outline of the passions is lost, modern complexity is in every note. Art, of course, must be the outcome of the artist, and Antoine Lütz's work, like all the work of the present day, is subjective, not objective."

She was scarcely addressing her companions; she was arguing out her own thought, still talking or thinking aloud; she had walked over to the window, and the others were left alone. Neither critical nor analytical thoughts were in their minds. To Dolores, it was beautiful music, which pictured a beautiful story, that the composer himself had once told her, and which always came back to her, when she sang it. A story—not life—not real enough for that; the real part was the life she had seen fade away, in vain struggle against time, the shadow over the home which had sheltered her, and in which she had known, she said now, the happiest hours of her life.

To the man's storm-tossed passionate heart, the music was the echo of his own love—the echo of all the bitter pain his life had known. He did not speak; he turned from where he had been standing, and took her hand in both of his. It was a moment before, "Thank you," he said, in a low, moved voice. "I have heard of Lütz's music, of course, but this is the first time I have heard anything of it; I shall never forget it. Come here," he drew

her nearer to the window, to the fading light, and looked at her with some newly awakened curiosity, as if he had never seen her before. "Tell me, what are you going to do—stay here?"

There was nothing to resent in his question, it was so evidently strongly aroused interest; he held her hand still, and looked down into her faintly troubled face. His mind had been so full of other things, she had scarcely been to him more than a shadowy child, in whom the Princess had been interested; but now, something else was roused.

Remembrances came back which made the fact that she had left Ingelheim to avoid Jerome, and which had roused no interest, assume sudden importance. Of a sudden he saw her, as a young ignorant child, possessed of this great gift, and in her youth and gentleness, so utterly unfitted for the life to which the talent pointed.

"Is this your home?" he questioned, drawing her more into the shadow of the deep recess, "then stay in it; do not be tempted to leave it."

His voice was as earnest as if it had been a sister to whom he spoke.

"Do not believe in anything," lowering his voice, "that they may tell you; nothing can make up to a woman for the shelter of home."

Dolores's eyes suddenly filled with tears; she had never cried yet since that first sad night when the blow had fallen, but now, unreasonably, foolishly, under the influence of those kind, impetuous words,

the tears slowly clouded her eyes, and wetted her long lashes. She lifted her hand to brush them away, but it was useless; slowly, one by one, they fell down her cheeks.

With a quick turn, Dorislaus satisfied himself they were alone. Miss Russell's figure was disappearing in the distance through another long room; he bent his head, and said quickly, "Why did you go? Tell me, trust me; were you not happy?"

She shook her head, and then, as if his eyes compelled speech, perhaps the kind clasp of his hand, so friendly where all was strange. "*He* was not happy," she said, low and quickly.

He did not say a word; he did not exclaim or refute; by some quick instinct, he understood it all.

"He did not mean me to find it out," Dolores added, hesitatingly.

"He would never have wished that," the man said, gravely.

"No," Dolores assented, "he is too good and kind to wish that; but I cannot go back, you see, I must stay here for the present."

"And then? Promise me this," he went on, without waiting for an answer, "do not grow into a worldly, ambitious woman. Do not let any one persuade you that ambition can make up for love—it is better, a thousand times better, to be lonely and unhappy all your life, than to grow satisfied with what the world offers instead. They will

persuade you," he went on, as Dolores strove surreptitiously to dry her eyes, "that you will find happiness in success, and you will believe them, perhaps, but it is not true—not true," his voice growing more passionate. "I tell you, I, who have known the world, that ambition never made a woman happy yet; it hardens and kills the soul, or breaks the heart."

His words, so strong and vehement, came with such truth and force, that Dolores, even in her ignorance, felt they owed their vehemence to some hidden source, somehow they checked her tears, and gave her back her voice.

"I am going to stay here," she said, gently. "I do not think, though every one has done so much for me, I shall ever be able to sing as they wish; I cannot learn to act, but perhaps I shall be able to sing at concerts, or teach, I am so stupid about learning new things," she smiled sadly, "and not brave enough to try."

"You are no coward," he said, shortly. "You are brave and truly loving—and that is all that women should be."

He bent his head and touched her hand with his lips. "Good-bye, it is time, I know, for me to start; I am going to Paris to-night, and shall see the Princess to-morrow. If ever you want help or advice,—write to her, and she will give it to you." He scribbled an address on a card, and gave it to her. "That is my address," he said, putting it in

her hand, "send your thanks to the Princess there, and I will forward them—I do not yet know where she is."

His departure seemed good-bye to another bit of the past, but his words, his very silence, had been encouraging and strengthening. His silence had accented her own consciousness that she had done right.

"And he knew—he was his friend," she said, as she sobbed herself to sleep.

"Poor child!" Dorislaus thought pitifully, as he pursued his night journey, "even the children may not hope to escape."

Dolores's tears had touched him, and the rectitude and honesty of the girl's heart had awoke responsive echoes. "But better, a thousand times better, a few tears and much unhappiness now, than a mistake that nothing could set right."

He admired and respected her decision, and would never have striven to alter it, there was nothing to wish to alter; he knew Jerome, and he had learnt in a short time a great deal of this girl. He did not read the problem as Virginia would have done, though the result was the same.

"They would both be very unhappy, though Jerome would honourably try to fulfil his duty, and Dolores in her simplicity and love might for a time live in a dream paradise, but no one lives there for ever, and the awakening would break her heart. Far, far better find it out now. Every one suffers," his grave eyes

fixed on the darkness without, "but better to suffer as the girl does, than as Jerome does." Friendship so far lifted the veil, that he understood that.

The next morning, when Dolores entered the breakfast-room, a letter, in Jerome's well-known writing, lay by her plate. The hand trembled which lifted it, she gave a nervous glance towards where Miss Russell was pouring out tea—she did not look up or make any remark, and Dolores slipped it into her pocket.

Afterwards she stole up into her own room, and locked the door, and opening it, read it slowly, kneeling on the wide window-seat by the open window through which was wafted the scent of the roses and honeysuckle round the windows.

"It might mean so much," she thought, even as her own common-sense answered, "it can mean nothing."

"MY DEAR DOLLY,—Your message has been given to me by Countess Miramar, that you do not wish to see me. Against my own judgment I do as you ask. For six months I shall wait, and at the end of that time I shall go to England and shall see you, and learn from your own lips what you wish. You know, I am sure you must know, that if you would become my wife to-morrow, you have only to say the word, and I should go to you. Dolly, dear, I do not fear the future, tell me what you are afraid of? Trust me, you have always done so, have you not? trust

me and see me. I believe I should convince you that you would never regret it, but if you insist upon waiting, then so be it. I shall stay here, indeed my service makes it difficult for me to go away, but in six months' time I shall expect to see you. The Miramars have left; I shall, however, hear from Virginia where you are. In the meantime, believe that if you trusted yourself to me, God knows, you should never regret it.

JEROME.

"I did not see your sister, the Countess gave me your message."

She read it over many, many times, whilst the birds sang gaily amidst the flowers below, and the bees hummed round the window, and its full meaning made its way into her heart. He was loyal; he offered her all he had to offer,—he would make her happy if he could,—and a month ago, Dolores would have answered "Yes, it would be happiness."

But a little light had penetrated, and revealed so much, that ignorance and childishness were alike banished for ever.

That which he offered would not even be happiness now to her; she knew too much to be satisfied with so little. It was a long time before she sat down and took up a pen to write an answer, and, with the pen in her hand, there seemed so little to say, and letter-writing never had been her strong point.

The writing was almost more characterless and schoolgirlish than ever, in her anxiety to say nothing that should wound.

“DEAR CAPTAIN SHORE,—It was very kind of you to write that letter which I have just received. You have always been very good to me, and I trust you *quite* ; but I am sure it would be better not to meet. Miss Russell is very kind. I was so pleased to see Marie, I had missed her terribly. DOLLY.”

Perhaps in both letters, his letter and her reply, it was that which was left unsaid that told all that there was to tell.

CHAPTER XLIII.

“A Touts Jours Loyale.”

ALTHOUGH in a way Jerome Shore's letter rendered their parting not final, and made of this summer a probation, yet to Dolores no illusions were possible, and little by little, as the weeks passed and new interests sprang up, the keenness of the pain faded. After all, it was a long time now since Jerome had been part of her daily life, that in a way helped, and Dolores in her quiet gentle way was too reasonable, too unemotional, voluntarily to make herself miserable.

And there was that in her nature, always had been, which found a certain happiness in obedience. The independent effort of will which had effected her departure from Ingelheim without the help or consent of those in authority, had constituted the really bitterest part of the business, and it was a great relief to find that the step was approved, that all those whose judgment she respected, to whom in any way she owed obedience, indorsed the correct-

ness of her action, restored her peace of mind in great measure.

Jerome's picture and that of the Huguenot found its place among her other girlish treasures, she looked at them often. Sometimes her gentle eyes clouded with tears, but not often.

"I did right," she thought, "it was very difficult to know what was best, but every one thinks so." She had read thus much in the words or the silence of all she met.

Deep down in her tender heart, what she really most craved after was Marie's presence; the ever-ready sympathy and love, which in that long residence under Justine Miramar's roof, had rendered her so dear.

They, the Miramars, had spent the summer travelling in Switzerland; from many lovely places letters had come, telling, in Marie's warm impassioned language, all that she was seeing for the first time. She wrote very often, so did her mother, and each letter contained the same words alike from mother and daughter. "You must come back, Dolores, your home is with us, my child, my dear daughter," Justine wrote. "Dolores, dear, my sister, come back." But, notwithstanding, Dolores hesitated, hesitated, though her own heart echoed so longingly the words.

It seemed ungrateful to Miss Russell, she felt, the strong craving she had to return, Miss Russell who was so good to her. She grudged her nothing.

A life of whims is apt, as time goes on, to make

life full of small, and barren of great interests. At five-and-forty, Miss Russell was glad to throw her strong energies into something so novel as another person's future. She took the girl to London, and strove by all the means that came into her head to break off associations with the past. "Love—a girl's love—was a trifle. Novelty and amusement, and the consciousness of power easily gained by the exhibition of her talent, would soon eclipse all that. It had been an unfortunate interlude, but very happily and easily got over."

So Miss Russell's well-known handsome form appeared everywhere, with Dolores's slight girlish figure always by her side; her eyes, a little tired, often now looked out from a very small white face, and people turned away with a shrug from Miss Russell's newest whim, scarcely hearing, certainly not noting the shy response to the dull conventional words: they listened to her pure young voice, congratulated Miss Russell on her discovery of such talent, and talked to her more often than to the girl herself, as to what was to be her future.

Her lessons were the happiest hours of the day, and in that matter also Miss Russell grudged nothing. The best masters London could produce were hers. And yet withal, if Elinor Russell had gone another way to work, and instead of silence over the past and prophecies for the future, and constant amusement in the present, she had allowed the girl to talk over the doubts and sorrows that had beset

her young troubled heart, had encouraged her decision by the support of her own strong will, she would have gone a surer way to work.

As it was, Dolores's thoughts constantly turned with a longing that was pain to Justine Miramar's kind sympathy, to Marie's young warm-hearted sisterly tenderness, and it was all she could do to persist in the path that her own heart judged to be right and best.

"I must wait—wait a little longer," she said, as she put away Marie's letters; but even to herself she did not allow that the term of waiting was a fixed one.

It was really, she fancied, less hard to bear when they left London, and the gaieties which had not amused, only distracted her, and returned to Beverley Hall. The country was fresh and lovely after the confinement of London; visitors came down constantly for a day or two; clever men, artists, violinists; and Dolores was amused at their talk, charmed with their talents. The weeks wore away, turned into months, the summer faded, the leaves began to drop from the trees, and Miss Russell to talk vaguely of having had enough of England.

"We will go to the Riviera, Dolly, and enjoy a little sunshine; it is getting to the time of year when every one, even the cleverest, is dull; they cannot help it, it is the want of stimulant in the air that sunshine gives; we will go away till they revive. But not yet, we must wait till December is well in.

After all," she added, a little later, "I suppose it is unpatriotic to leave before Christmas, it disappoints many people; we shall end, I suppose, by waiting till January."

Dolores drew a little quick breath, she was not quite sure if she was glad or sorry; on the tenth of December it would be six months since Jerome wrote. Well, there was plenty of time, it was only the first of November; Miss Russell might change her mind many times yet. Scarcely recognised by herself was the hope that by some chance which it should be out of her power to influence, this journey to the Continent might involve a meeting with the Miramars. She was thinking of this faint half-disguised hope as she sat down that afternoon,—a dull, dreary still November afternoon,—to write to Marie Adios. It was the most cheering occupation she could think of, and she felt in need of cheering. Miss Russell had gone away on a couple of days' visit, and there had been a little doubt in Dolores's mind as to how she should spend the time. It is greatly to be feared that her mind to her no kingdom was: she was sadly dependent on the society of others.

She did not talk much, but she never voluntarily remained alone for long. She was not a reader; she was clever with her needle and with her music—there began and ended her accomplishments. It was a strict sense of duty that made her read French and German, and continue struggling over an Italian

grammar; it would be wrong, she felt, to let slide all she had had such opportunities of acquiring. And at any moment she might be glad to turn to them as a means of livelihood, "Though I do not know," she would think despairingly, grammar and dictionary open before her, "how I should begin to teach it? I cannot remember how I learnt."

But this afternoon, "it was too dull for anything of that sort," she decided, she would write to Marie, and then practise.

She had intended to drive to the Parsonage, she was always happy there; there was the familiarity of custom, the intimacy of childhood, that knowledge of a mutual past, which must always count, whatever may come afterwards. Dolores did not criticise or think much about them, they were simply the Trahernes,—mamma, whose little crossnesses were a matter of course, to be accepted as part of a system with which she had nothing to do; papa, who grumbled a good deal, and found fault in a feeble way with many things which he did not attempt to alter; and the girls, who were always glad to see her, and who listened with gratified open-eyed admiration and interest to the account of her doings in Ingelheim, and who, in their turn, had always some eventful parish tale to relate, which somehow generally began or ended with the curate. It was with some regret Dolores decided the weather was unfavourable for a drive; it looked too much like rain, she thought, standing by the window watching the dull grey sky.

She wished with sudden longing that she had thought of asking Miss Russell's permission for the girls to stay with her during her solitude, and she was glad when stout Mrs Davies, the housekeeper, came in during the afternoon and sat and talked to her a little. Servants always liked Dolores; she was so gentle in her manner, so helpful and independent, and so grateful for any little kindness shown her, and she never forgot their interests and cares. Mrs Davies, above all, had known the girl all her life, had stood by her at the font when Miss Russell had given her her foreign name, and had followed with interest all the chances of her life. "It is dull for you, Miss Dolly, sitting here all alone; I have just looked in to see how you are getting on. I suppose," she went on, "you are too grand a young lady now, to come and have a cup of tea in the housekeeper's room?"

"May I? Would you," Dolores began shyly. "I should like it so much. I *am* rather dull," she added, confidentially.

"So I should think, Miss; well, come along first to the drawing-room and sing me something,—it will please you to know you are giving an old woman a deal of pleasure."

Mrs Davies was not easily satisfied; a great deal of the afternoon had slipped by, when she went away to get the tea ready, leaving Dolores to return to her letter. That letter it was very difficult to write; if possible more difficult than usual, because Dolores's

loving heart longed to accept the Miramars' invitation, and go, as Marie suggested, at any rate on a month's visit. "We shall be in Paris; there will be no need for you to see any one you do not wish to see. The past is past and done with, it has all gone completely out of our life. Come, dear Dolores, to your loving sister Marie." That was the point of the letter she had to answer, and to add to the difficulty the Countess had written to Miss Russell, and had suggested the same thing, but more formally.

"Send her to us for a time," she had written, "until at least you are passing through Paris on your way south."

And Miss Russell had evidently considered the plan a good one.

"It is a pity, Dolly, not to keep good friends with them," she had said after reading it. "They are very fond of you, and their friendship is of value. Besides, after all, they owe you a good deal for the way they have disquieted you." And as Dolores made no reply, but only looked worried and troubled, "there is no fear of meeting with either Captain Shore or his sister, if that is what troubles you. Virginia is thinking of nothing but her marriage; it is to take place on the 7th of December, and Jerome of course cannot get away till after that, and it is not likely that he will be in Paris."

It was better, Miss Russell felt, to put the facts into words, and Dolores's quick changing colour showed that they had gone home. She added noth-

ing more, thinking it better, having spoken, to leave her to the two days' reflection.

"You shall do nothing you do not wish, of course, dear," she said, as she kissed the girl for good-bye, "but it would not be wise to let sentimentalism interfere with what is best. It would be really foolish to check, for no reason, the kindness of the Miramars."

And Dolores felt helpless under that strong masterful voice and presence, unless, of course, she had a reason, and could give it. And if there was one, it was scarcely acknowledged to herself even in thoughts; to put it into words would have necessitated changing Dolores into some one else. It was difficult, however, to write about other things, leaving unalluded to this important topic, and Dolores paused after the date, the pen in her hand, still wondering what the first words should be. She started when the door opened, half-disappointed, half-relieved that Mrs Davies should have returned so soon; it would postpone the difficult moment till to-night, perhaps till to-morrow.

She rose with a sigh, which was only worry, not regret, and turned to find herself not facing stout kindly Mrs Davies, but a big, broad-shouldered man: it was fully a second of wondering astonishment before she recognised in this brown sunburnt stranger Jem Traherne. Only a second, though, and then familiarity had proved stronger than strangeness—and her mind had taken a great leap, not to their last part-

ing, but to the continuous, happy, never-to-be-forgotten days that had preceded it.

"Jem, dear," she was beside him, holding his hands, in his arms, before she had realised anything, except the great overwhelming happiness of his presence. For once, gentle, calm Dolores, flushed with excitement, was asking continuous questions, to which she could scarcely hear the answers; but the great answer was his presence.

"What has brought you home, Jem? They told me you were not coming for two years more. Why did you not write?"

They had moved over to the window, and were standing facing each other, her eager face lifted to his.

"Well, Dolly, I had not time."

"Not time," she repeated, wonderingly, "have you finished your work?"

"No, I have come on a month's holiday."

"Only a month?" a disappointed ring in the tones.

"That is all they would give me." He did not add at what price of daring defiance he had gained so much; "but there was something in England I had to see to."

"It must be very important," Dolores said, curiously. "But whatever it is, I am glad you have come."

The flush was still on her cheeks; there was no mistaking the gladness in her eyes. "Jem will

understand," the thought was rushing through her heart, "Jem will tell me what to do."

He always had understood; surely there is no stronger tribute to a man's heart. But it was not to his heart Dolores applied that subtle instinct, but to his cleverness. She would tell him all, and he would advise her. There was rest and relief in the thought. She was able with that reflection to put aside all her worries, which a moment before had seemed so overwhelming, and to turn her attention with curiosity and interest to the reason of his presence.

All these past weeks in which Jem, working hard against adverse circumstances, had been making his way homeward, he had constantly been figuring to his mind this meeting, under what circumstances it would occur, how she would look, what he should say. He had pictured her broken-hearted, sorrowing, despairing, proud, cold, bearing this slight in every possible way—except as he had found her; the same tender affectionate Dolly he had almost forgotten, in the shadow called up by their parting, with that look of trust in her eyes, and that undisguised smile of welcome. Dolores's feelings were very transparent. There was honest glad welcome, no haunting shadow for the moment of the last parting. She had perhaps forgotten, perhaps it was merely momentarily overpowered by the greater length of the past that had preceded it. Anyway there was no shyness, only gladness in her eyes; she did not shrink away from him, but stood by his side

in the window, asking question after question about his work and his life. But when she repeated her first question as to why he had come, and so unexpectedly, he paused a little, as if wondering how to frame his answer.

"You never wrote to me, Dolly; do you not remember you were to write and tell me if you were in any trouble."

At his words, his tone, she flushed scarlet; she was remembering now, he saw, as he looked down at her drooped eyelids, remembering all that stood between the brother and sister love of old days, had probably in the interval grown to look upon it as a dream; or perhaps his words had recalled her sorrow, which for the moment had been pushed aside, anyway there was gentleness and pity in his stern young face.

"Dolly, dear," and as he spoke, resting both hands on her shoulders, he drew her a little nearer, "you know why I have come back. When my mother's letter reached me, telling me——" He broke off, and began another sentence. "I waited a mail for a letter from you; do you not remember you said you would write yourself if you were in trouble, and I promised that I would come? I had not had a line from you for a very long time, but that was because you were happy, at least so I hoped, but when I heard you were in trouble and still did not write, I was very anxious."

"I could not write," she shook her head sadly.

"I should not have known what to say. And you could not help me, no one could. I had to do it," with a sudden catch in her voice.

"I was your brother, Dolly; you remembered that, did you not?"

Jem's straight brows were drawn into a frown, he put his hand under the girl's chin, and lifted her face, "If you had wanted a brother, you would have sent to me?"

"Oh, Jem!" Dolores's hands were covering her face, her words came with a sob, "he was quite kind always, always: it was not his fault—it was a mistake."

She had freed herself from his light touch, and with hasty steps had crossed the room and was back at his side, a letter in her hand, before he had spoken.

"Read it," she faltered, "it is what he wrote;" and almost unthinkingly, Jem opened it and began to read, before he had realised what it was. Jerome's letter, of course, and while he read it, Dolores, with anxious eyes lifted to his, seemed to plead for comprehension and tenderness. Under that look he felt powerless to refuse to understand.

"It was a mistake, that was all, you see," Dolores began, falteringly.

"Yes, Dolly, I see."

He folded it up and gave it back, but though he spoke gravely, there was no anger in his voice. "He means to be honest and true."

It cost Jem Traherne a great deal to say that; it would have been easy, not knowing the man, and knowing Dolores so well, to put another interpretation upon the circumstances; but there was no self-deception possible with Jem, he saw things clearly sharp-cut, as they were, not as he would have had them be.

"It had been a mistake; Dolly had found it out—in time, thank God," he said to himself, "in time." She had in her simplicity and rectitude striven to set it right; and the man also, here in his own handwriting, was striving also to do his best towards the same end. Both were trying in their different ways to set the wrong right, but even for a mistake, in this world, where there is a price for everything, it is impossible to avoid paying.

To Jem Traherne all this was at once evident. He was young in years, but he was a man who had matured young, and these two past years had been rich in experience. His strong, vigorous character was not one that would ever waste a moment in vain regrets, or find consolation in equally vain abuse. There was nothing morbid in his nature, which should find satisfaction in contemplating the faults of others; to see a wrong, was to strive to remedy it—or to leave it alone.

"Tell me what answer you made to this," touching the letter as he spoke.

"Jem was so easy to speak to, Jem always understood," once more through Dolores's perplexed young

brain flew the thoughts, and then in a moment she was pouring out a quick confused account of all she had done and thought; the wishes of the moment which were at war with what she considered well, finding relief in the utterance of thoughts and feelings, which hitherto had had no outlet. And Jem listened, by some intuition gathering from Dolores's vague words and unfinished sentences what her difficulty was. Presently as they talked he drew her down on to the broad, low window-seat, and seated himself beside her, the dull November evening growing darker, though unnoticed, as he gained from her her story.

"My plan," Dolores confided, as she grew calmer and more coherent under the influence of twilight, and the quiet, restful presence of her listener, "is just to wait a little longer,"—even now she could not put that date mentioned in Jerome's letter into words. "I would rather," and she lifted pleading eyes to her companion's face, "I would rather, if Captain Shore does come, that I should see him here."

He had meant to be so calm and wise, first to regain that abandoned position of elder brother, and from that vantage-ground conquer slowly and surely the future; but when the low hurrying voice stopped, and out of the dusk so close to him, those sweet anxious eyes were raised to his, calmness and wisdom were alike banished.

"Listen to me first, Dolly. I have a better plan than that."

Suddenly his arm was round her, there was no mistaking the light in his grey eyes, as holding her close to him, he looked at her.

"Be my wife. You know, you must know, how I love you ; you are the only woman I have ever loved ! Trust yourself to me, and you *shall* be happy."

It seemed to him that for a moment she rested peacefully, contentedly, in his arms, before she strove to free herself, before she raised her white face to his. "Jem, dear," the low voice was very faltering, "you know I loved him a great deal, and still, though it is all over, I am very fond of him."

"Yes, Dolly, I know that."

He rose and took a turn through the room, and when he returned to her side, taking her hands, he drew her up unresistingly to stand beside him. She did not shrink away when he put his arm round her, and drew her smooth head nearer, till it rested against his rough tweed coat.

Standing thus he spoke again—

"It was a mistake, Dolly, as you say, that is all, and this, this is real. I love you," honest passion in his low voice, "you alone can make me happy ; you know that this is not a fancy of yesterday ; give me your trust, Dolly, and I will teach you to love me."

"I do not need to learn, Jem, I have always loved you. It was different," she hesitated, "and it seems selfish, but, Jem," and suddenly she lifted her arms and clasped them about his neck, "I am so lonely, and you are the only person I am happy with."

“Dear, dear Dolly!” He kissed her tenderly, and did not move the protecting arm that held her so close, “that is all I ask yet—your trust and confidence. I have been afraid to speak,” there was a tremor in the decided voice, “I was so afraid of failing. It was risking so much.”

“You really care so very much?”

“Yes, Dolly, so very much. You are the only woman in the world for me, always have been, since you were a little child.”

The words, like a kind healing touch to one in pain, seemed to touch and heal that aching spot in Dolores’s heart, which troubled and hurt whenever a casual word or look probed it; it may have been hurt pride as well as hurt love, but Dolores’s gentle true nature would never have considered it well to give it a name. It was something it was as well not to think about, because no thinking could set it right, but the first possibility of healing came with the soothing of Jem’s words,—and though every wound must heal with a scar, a great deal rests in our own power as to how it heals.

There was no doubt about the shy pleasure in Dolores’s eyes and the shy pride. She asked no more questions, it never was her way to doubt what she was told,—there was happiness, immediate, real, flooding her innocent heart at the tone in Jem’s voice, the look in his grey eyes. He wanted her, that meant a great deal at this crisis of her life.

Later on, when Mrs Davies came to see what they

were doing, they were side by side on the low, broad window-seat, unconscious of the twilight which had become almost darkness, and it was a minute before her eyes, growing accustomed to the want of light, discovered them, and then, "Master Jem," she said, questioningly, the familiar appellation rising to her lips, "then it is true," as at her voice he rose. "John told me it was you, but I did not credit him. No one was expecting you," she said, as he took her hand, "at least I had heard no word of it."

"No, Mrs Davies, I had no time to warn any one, but here I am."

"Well, you will have cheered poor little Miss, it was very lonesome for her. I have told them to bring you some tea in here," she went on to Dolores, "visitors are so scarce that you must come to me another night, when you have no one to amuse you. Mr Jem will have a deal to tell you, I'm sure."

She bustled away to order lights, unconscious of how Jem and Dolores laughed over her words.

Yes, he had a great deal to tell her, and Dolores was always an admirable listener, and as she sat there making tea with that flush on her cheeks and pretty softness in her eyes, to Jem it was incredible how any one could look at her and not think her, as he had always done, the prettiest, most lovable woman, it had ever been his luck to meet.

He stayed a long time, so long that Mrs Davies, crossing the hall, seeing Dolores with her hand on the lock of the heavy front door, watching him

as he strode away into the damp darkness of the November night, felt her suspicions aroused, and they were increased when she met the first look on the girl's face as, closing the door, she turned back into the house.

"What a fine handsome man Mr Jem has grown into," she said, as Dolores, seeing her, gave a little smile.

"He always was handsome, was he not, Mrs Davies? but of course he is older."

"He has all the looks of the family," Mrs Davies said, kindly and sympathetically—Dolores's expression seemed to demand sympathy—"and the brains too," she added, "begging his reverence's pardon."

Dolores laughed.

"He is *immensely* clever," she said, decidedly. "You do not know all he has done. Are you busy, Mrs Davies? May I come to the housekeeper's room and tell you about it?"

And when Dolores's eager young voice had bidden her good night, Mrs Davies knew almost as much as she did herself. The girl's secret was not hard to read.

"And a very good thing too," she thought, with kindly sympathy. "A name and a home is what the poor child wants, not to be turned over from one to the other, just as the whim takes them."

Before going to bed, Dolores, with cheeks still flushed and heart beating with excitement, stole into the little sitting-room, which had been given up to

her, and looked at her row of photographs. She hesitated a little over the first ones, but at last it was Jerome Shore's eyes that were looking into hers, and there was a slight catch in her breath as she lifted the portrait and looked long at it by the light of the candle she carried. When she had put it back in its place, there were no rebellious or angry thoughts in her heart; even that little unacknowledged throb of pain that so often followed a casual sight of the well-known features was absent to-night. Jem's tenderness was still about her, calming all other pain.

"So many people make mistakes," she said, softly, as she went up-stairs, "and never find them out till it is too late; it would be a dreadful thing to make people you cared for unhappy, just through a mistake!"

She said her prayers with a special addition of thankfulness for the smoothing of her path, and with a thought for all she loved, settled down to rest, a thought for all, the last for Jem, who wanted her, who loved her. She was asleep, but the sweet lingering smile the thought gave birth to, still curved her lips as she slept.

A second love need not overshadow a first,—it grows apart.

CHAPTER XLIV.

“Westward look—the land is bright.”

“SHE came to me when I was in trouble because she hoped to help me; now that I am happy again I should like to go to her, and tell her so.”

This was Dolores's explanation to Jem of the longed-for visit to Paris, as she sat with him in the old Rectory, in her hand a letter from Marie, full of loving messages from the Countess, loving words from herself. And in addition to all the vague tenderness, was the definite wish that she should return to them, and be married from their house.

“What do you wish, Dolly? Would you like that?” Jem asked, when he had read it. He was the only person—it did not strike Dolores, but so it was—who did not tell her to do this or that, but asked her, and abided by her choice, and, perhaps stranger still, the only person with whom Dolores found it easy to express a wish, to realise what she herself desired. She shook her head faintly.

“No?” he said, questioningly; “then from whose

house, Dolly, is it to be? You have so many people competing for the honour, that you will have to make up your mind soon." He stroked her hair gently, and waited as if for an answer.

"I am not free you know, dear, or I should not try to hurry you; but you will not ask me to go back alone, leaving you with strangers, however kind."

"No, Jem, please," the voice was rather low and very tremulous, "I do not want you to leave me."

He kissed her fondly.

"Then, Dolly, you see we shall have to be very quick in considering what is to be done. The 15th of November, and on the 1st of January we shall have to sail for our new home. Would you like to talk to my mother?" he began after a pause, as she made no comment, "to Miss Russell?" as still she did not speak, only the clasp of her hand tightened.

There was a troubled sigh from the girl in the silence that followed his words, and he waited till speech should follow it. Nothing could equal Jem's patience and gentleness; that may have been in part the reason why Dolores could explain herself better to him than to any one else.

It is generally the custom of the listener to interpret beforehand what the speaker means to say, and to impose his own interpretation, and then blame the bewildered speaker for scarcely recognising which is his own thought, and which the other's interpretation.

There was silence save for that one quick sigh till Dolores spoke again. "I do not want to talk to

any one about it except to you. I am so stupid," she smiled, "that I cannot make any one else understand."

"Then talk to me." He put his arm round her, and drew her close to him. "There, now tell me all, I shall understand."

"I thought that I might go *now* directly, as she says"—touching the letter she held—"to Paris for a few days to see them, to tell them. I love her so much," breaking off a little disconnectedly, "and *now*," a little stress on the word, "it is different, I do not mind going, I should like it."

"So you shall, Dolly," he answered. "It is, as you say, different, easier," he corrected, "it will only be for a short visit. And I will go over while you are there, and make their acquaintance."

"Yes, yes, I should like that; but I do not wish to stay, I want to return *here*," there was a quick nervous look which he did not miss. "You see this is my home now. I came here, I had left everything, and Miss Russell has been very kind to me, and she wishes it. I think it would be best to come back *here*."

She was afraid, of course, that the idea might pain him, that it was from Miss Russell's, not from his father's house, that the marriage should take place. But she was right, so it ought to be. Miss Russell's roof had sheltered her; it was she who ought to be considered, and she herself wished, and considered that so it should be arranged. Dolores was quite

right, but it cost his proud young soul a pang to acknowledge it.

This woman to whom, in some vague manner, he owed these three years of pain, all the trouble he had known, who had spoilt so many happy hours by indulging a whim, this was not the woman with whom he would have preferred to associate his marriage, but his own wishes did not alter the fact. Dolores was right; it was to Miss Russell she had turned when she needed help, and in womanly ungrudging manner it had been accorded, there was nothing but a sentimental grudge after all.

And on the other side, how much Dolly owed to the whim. He had to acknowledge that, as he walked back late that night through the mild November night to the Parsonage, the memory of Dolores haunting his steps.

It was difficult even to recall the appearance of the dowdy little schoolgirl whose presence was always rising in memory in the well-known Parsonage rooms, only the sweet soft eyes were still just the same, as they had met his own so often this evening. But all else was so different; in the slight slim girl who had sat opposite him at dinner, everything about her, from the gold comb in her smooth dark hair to the buckled shoes on her small feet, betokening wealth and all that it can give, and afterwards, when she had stood by Miss Russell's side, and had sung, he had recognised still more all that for which he ought to feel grateful.

"I am grateful," he said, though he did not deny that following the words was the thought, "and jealous." Jealous that all she had acquired it had not been in his power to grant.

When he had said good night, she had walked out with him into the hall, as was her custom, to receive his good-night kiss; to-night, in giving it, he looked at her a minute, undisguised admiration in his eyes.

"I feel, Dolly," he said, slowly, "rather as if I were persuading you to give up a great future, because your voice *is* beautiful, you know, and it may be only old-fashioned prejudice that makes me think you will be happier with me."

There was unusual doubt in Jem's confident voice, but Dolores's kisses put it away.

"No, Jem, I *know*," she laughed, "you are quite mistaken; they have all tried, but I am too stupid, they can do nothing with me. They could only teach me to sing, and that is not enough."

"It is enough for me."

Returning through the dark lanes he was more than ever sure of the wisdom of the arrangement. His mother, he knew, would be vexed at this decision that the wedding should take place from Beverley Hall. She would complain in a feeble, inconsequent manner that it was a slight, or so might be considered in the eyes of her small world. In just such a manner she disapproved of the marriage itself. It was a disappointment, she said

to her husband, in the privacy of their chamber, that Jem, who might have done anything, have married anybody, should thus have set his heart on Dolores, of all the girls in the world.

To Jem himself her disapproval was expressed in the vain inconsequent fashion in which years ago she had assailed his choice of a profession. The querulous tone was so familiar that he scarcely observed it, certainly gave it no place in his mind; his strength, calm and reasonable, was not to be troubled by such weak disapproval; she was a woman, and therefore scarcely fitted for judging of the world, and a man's life therein; and more than that, his mother, who loved him, and cared for his happiness, and was prone to fear his missing it. That was natural, and to be dealt with lovingly and gently, for the sake of the love which prompted it,—the love whose presence he never doubted, though it showed itself in such a different fashion from that which he would have chosen. His judgment was probably right, love has an uncomfortable habit of showing itself in ineffective fault-finding.

“Of course it must be your way,” Mrs Traherne said, when Jem had announced the decision at which he had arrived. Dolores's name he left out of the question.

“You have always taken your own way in large things and small, but it is a disappointment that you should prefer to be married from a stranger's house.”

"It is better," Jem assented, ignoring the complaint. "I have thought it well over before deciding."

"Ah, Jem," his mother sighed, "you have always known better than your father and mother. I hope you will never regret insisting on taking your own way."

"I hope not." One of Jem's rare, bright smiles illumined his eyes — "I have not begun to regret yet."

Mrs Traherne shook her head, and when she next spoke, the querulousness had vanished, and there was genuine pathos in her voice. "Oh, Jem, of course you think me unsympathetic, but I cannot approve, and it is impossible for me to pretend."

"Why do you not approve?" Jem spoke gently, touched by the genuineness of the feeling expressed. "Dolly, who was like your own daughter for so many years, whom you know to be true and good and sweet-tempered, and whom," his voice was not quite so steady, "I have loved ever since she was a little child."

"Oh dear, Jem, I am not saying anything against her."

Whatever smallness of nature there might be in Mrs Traherne, all the largeness was comprised in her motherly love, and she could scarcely divide Dolores in her heart from those others who were in truth her own. "It is not, of course, the child herself, but if you had waited, Jem, you are so clever,

so handsome, you might have done so much better ; it is so disappointing."

This he understood ; it was a phase of motherly love, and his larger nature could take it at its true worth.

"I am afraid, mother," he kissed her as he spoke, "it is not the first time that I have disappointed you."

"But this is different," she insisted. "After all, you were right before—at least it seems now as if you had been—it is so difficult to know what is best for a boy !" But she did not pursue the parallel, not even in her own mind ; she stopped, because she was reviewing the past, not because, from its lesson, she was foretelling the future. And Jem knew that, but he did not press his advantage. It was his mother's way, he thought, that was all, for himself it did not matter, but——

"You will not tell Dolly that you want me to wait and marry an heiress when I am a millionaire, will you, mother ? It might make her unhappy, because, of course, you are just like her own mother, and she would not wish to give you any trouble."

"Of course not. Poor little Dolly, it is not her fault ; it is only natural she should fall in love with you ! It would be extraordinary if she had not done so, no one can blame her for that."

And with that Jem was satisfied ; it was all motherly love ; she would feel Dolores's side just as much as his ; he did not fear anything more than

the futile complaints to which habit had inured him.

His father, also, had a word of disapproval, not on sentimental grounds, but on practical. "It is folly," he said, interrupting his son's explanation of his future; "to marry at your age is to hang a stone round your neck."

"Your advice, father," Jem answered, pleasantly, "is outweighed by your example. I am older than you were."

"I had a home and an assured income," and he sighed; "if you had followed in my steps——"

"I have a home to which to take her, and my income is good."

"For the present."

"I do not fear the future," Jem answered, steadily. "It does not do, either, to think only of one's self. If this home were to be broken up—and we can only count on the uncertainty of life—Dolly has no home, no claims on any one. I should not be happy, knowing that. As it is, the advantage of the education I have had is, that I am not afraid, whatever happens, of not being able to provide for my wife."

Every now and then it was borne in on Mr Traherne that this son, who had grown to manhood under his roof, who had never failed in respect, but who had gone his own way with such perfect independence, asking nothing, fearing no one, was of a different race from himself.

The questions of heredity did not trouble him. This was his eldest boy, and he had turned out much more satisfactorily than his boyish obstinacy had given promise of, but that was all.

Now, however, sometimes, that they were both men, and the lines of their lives were necessarily divided, he did have, now and again, a quick passing wonder as to the quality of that strong, self-reliant soul, which looked at him from under those well-defined straight brows. It is perplexing to rear up a young soul, and nurture it, and care for it in all its human needs, and then to find that there is no mutual language, that custom, and gratitude for daily food, has taught it the attitude of respect, and that is all; that all which constitutes its higher needs, its greater part, we have no text-book by which to interpret. And then, last bond of union, it ceases to need our care for its material wants, and nothing is left of the tie which bound us once so firmly together, but memory on our side, gratitude on his.

Sometimes, when Mr Traherne stood talking to his son, a foreshadowing of this moment would creep over him vaguely, because nothing in his mind was sharply or definitely experienced, but with a dully felt pang nevertheless. It does not need a brilliant imagination to feel pain, though something of the sort may be necessary for its definition.

The visit to Paris, to Dolores at least, left nothing

to desire; it was all exactly as she had pictured it in so many lonely moments at Beverley Hall.

Hers was not a nature to imagine evil or picture disappointment; and thus, spared the fear beforehand, the reality was marred by no imagined shadow.

To feel Marie's arms round her, to have some one, dear and loved as a sister, who only asked to be told of her future prospects, her present happiness; who was vividly, sincerely interested in everything that concerned her, great or small, and who could view things from the same level of youth and inexperience, it was this for which Dolores's heart had craved.

Here there was nothing to explain, all was known; and with that tact which only love can teach, it was always the right thing Marie Adios had to say.

There was something to be said, which weighed a little on Dolores's heart, but the sooner it was said the better; and yet the whole first evening had passed—she was talking to Marie over the fire in her room—before she found the exact words in which to make known her wish.

“Marie,”—there had been silence. Marie knew or guessed something which that silence foreshadowed; she was kneeling by Dolores's side in the bright blaze of the wood fire, she did not look up at the word.

“Marie, I want your mother to write to Captain

Shore," the voice faltered a little over the name, "and tell him——"

"Dolores," Marie looked up quickly, "you must not say *your* mother," there was a laugh which had a touch of nervousness in it, "you must say Madre."

"Madre," Dolores repeated, but she did not smile. "I do not want to write myself: it would look foolish, but I want him to know."

"Of course mother is the right person." Marie's voice was very low, "What shall she say?"

"She must tell him all," Dolores answered, quietly.

"Dolores," Marie's voice was quick and excited; she was looking up now, the red deepening on her cheeks, her eyes full of love and earnestness, and as she spoke she took Dolores's hands in hers, and looked straight into her eyes—"Dolores, tell me this—are you happy, quite happy? If *he*," there was no need for a name, "has spoilt your life, I can never forgive him."

Before she answered, Dolores kissed the eager, lovely face; and even then she paused a moment as if seeking the right words, all the while Marie kneeling by her side in the firelight waiting for her answer, though when it came it was not quite worded as Dolores had intended.

"I was quite happy *then*," she began, her voice a little unsteady, "but it was because I did not know. It could not have gone on; some day I should have

found out, and then, if it had been too late, it would have broken my heart."

"Found out what?" Marie questioned.

"He was always fond of me," Dolores's voice was quite firm, "and he would always have been kind to me, of that I am quite—quite sure; but it is not enough. I was so young," she added, "but now I know a great deal more, and it is not enough. In a little while we should both have been unhappy."

"And now?" Marie questioned; there was a thrill of nervous anxiety in her voice.

"Now I am happier every day; when you see Jem you will understand. There is nothing to be afraid of; he loves me," there was a faint touch of triumph in the soft voice. "I do not know how to explain it; perhaps it is because I have always known and cared for him, that it is easy to care more; and the other," her voice dropped, "was impossible, and when a thing is impossible, it cannot go on making you unhappy."

Perhaps Dolores's little simple code of philosophy might be followed with advantage by those who waste a great deal of time over more purposeless reasoning.

To grasp that the Impossible is no use sighing over, is to have made a great step towards simplifying our own daily walk, and smoothing the way for our fellow-travellers. To Dolores, life would always be a simple thing, because it would always mean doing her duty, or what she believed to be

such; and, fortunately, in an age where everything is terribly complex, duty remains as simple as it was in primeval times—at any rate for those to whom obedience is the form in which it most often shows itself.

“She would always be somebody’s slave,” Virginia said, when the news reached her, “and knowing Jerome, and not knowing Jem, she was inclined to believe that Jem would prove the easier master of the two; faith, in this case, was a relief from knowledge.” At the words her hearers laughed. So be it. There are, even in this independent age, probably always will be, some to whom the slavery of love will be dearer than freedom; and there may well have been a moment in such a crisis of Dolores’s life, when the knowledge of the love of a captor, who refused her her liberty, seemed invaluable, as compared with the affection which left her her freedom. There was no falseness, no sentimentality in her thoughts; Jem’s love was real, and of such long, slow growth, that she did not fear it would ever fail her; the other—had been a mistake—no one to blame, just a mistake; the tenderness had been so true that she could not forget it, did not even wish to do so; but childish tenderness had been killed, probably the capacity for a woman’s passion was born in the moment in which she had seen that look in Jerome Shore’s eyes as he stood looking at Marie Adios in the old-fashioned drawing-room of the “Golden Lion.” An instinct which

required no interpreter had told her what it meant ; —there had been no bitterness even in that first agonising moment ; the healthy do not quarrel with the facts of life, and the loving do not wish the offenders to pay for their faults, or even their mistakes ; for we must believe that love takes root, though the human flower fades, in something diviner than humanity.

And so Dolores, scarcely recognising her trouble to be a battle, had fought her way back again into peace, and happiness too ; there was no mistaking the light in her eyes ; perhaps happiness would be more commonly acquired, if we persistently turned our eyes towards where its light shines, though such rules are more commonly made than followed. Circumstance, of course, has much to say in the summing up of life, but character has more. To spring storms and sunshine we are indebted alike for the fading flowers of summer, and the blossoms that ripen into autumn fruit. It does not do to question either result. But of this we may be sure that if, as was commonly supposed, it was some dark-browed gipsy who had left the little nameless child at Mrs Traherne's door, and that carelessness or hardness had prompted the act, then all the legacy she had left the child had been the swift-coming colour in her brown cheeks, and the dark un-English eyes ; and to an unknown father she was indebted for a far worthier inheritance ; he must have been true and loyal, with some

strong strain of true nobility, which interpreted love to mean service, and grudged no obedience to those he trusted.

Dolores, however, did not so interpret the cloud that rested over her past.

"She died," she said once to Jem, "or she would have come back to look for me."

There was no doubt in her voice, and Jem assented, that in all probability such had been the case, or she would at least have been heard of, in those early days when his father was seeking everywhere for the missing mother. It was one solution at least, and where all alike was guess-work, as good as any other, and Dolores's faith and trust were not lightly to be set aside.

Dolores read the letter that, at her request, the Countess had written to Captain Shore. She took it away, and read it through several times in the solitude of her own room, and it seemed to her to be everything she desired. There was only the simple fact expressed in the easiest manner, in a short, friendly letter; no pretence at misunderstanding that the fact would be of interest to him, and yet no undue weight given to its importance.

She sighed when she had read the words; it had, after all, been a brilliant dream, and no after-glow can ever quite extinguish the first brilliance of youth's dream, however impossible of realisation. Now, Dolores knew it, they would soberly go their appointed ways, and both would probably know

much future happiness, but it would not be, never could be, for her again as it had been in those never-to-be-forgotten days. She sighed, but she did not linger or strive to recall them; they were past, and the present must always be purchased at the price of some past, though no such philosophical consolation followed her as she returned to the Countess's side.

"Is that what you wish me to say, Dolores?" she questioned.

And when the girl agreed, she kissed her fondly.

"Dolores, dear," she said, moved to unwonted emotion, "I cannot let you slip away out of my life. I am too fond of you for that. If I had had a second daughter," she added, "I should have chosen you."

Dolores smiled.

"I was always very happy with you. It was dreadful leaving you like that, after all you had done for me."

"It was best, I daresay," the Countess replied, gravely.

"Yes." Dolores spoke hesitatingly, but a minute after, lifting her eyes, "I could not explain," she added, "but it was best."

There was no question in reply, possibly the Countess feared too much, or knew too much, to hazard any further knowledge. But if her mother's heart pulled strongly in one direction, she was too just a woman to wrong another.

"Dolores"—she leant forward with almost the self-same movement, the self-same words that had arrested Dolores's attention the previous night, when Marie Adios had spoken—"tell me this, the truth, for the sake of the time when you were as my own daughter, are you happy? Happy," she added, in a louder voice, "as you deserve to be?"

"Yes, quite." There was no doubting Dolores's frank eyes and clear voice. "It is different, you see," it was easier to explain to this older woman than it had been to Marie, "*Jem loves me.*" If there was an unintentional reproach in the words, none had been meant, of that Justine Miramar was assured.

It was impossible to associate Dolores with stabs and reproaches.

She posted her letter addressed to Jerome Shore, that one swift fear that cruelty had been added to carelessness averted by Dolores's frank words. No, somehow Dolores had found out the mistake herself, it had not been Jerome's doing, he would have spared her the knowledge if he could. It was a relief to Justine Miramar, though why she would not put even to herself, in words.

There was an answer to the letter, just a few lines. It was received the very night before Dolores's short visit was over, and when she had read it, the Countess put it aside, waiting till the evening was over and Jem had left, before speaking of it. She understood Dolores better now than she had done

a week ago ; Jem's untiring, ceaseless devotion, his tenderness and strength, were sufficient, the older woman felt, to win any girl's love. She recognised and appreciated the manliness and self-reliance, the tenderness which expressed itself in every word and gesture.

To poor, little, homeless Dolores, it was no wonder such devotion and tenderness should appeal, especially with that association of a common past to add to it, and that memory which must be bitter, to give additional force to its meaning.

Dolores did not take this letter away to read in solitude ; with the flush still on her cheeks, the light in her eyes, that Jem's good-night kiss had brought there, she took it from the Countess's hand and read it, standing by the fireplace, one small foot on the fender, the soft folds of her white muslin dress falling round her.

There was silence whilst she read, both mother and daughter waiting, and so short was the letter that the smile, the happy smile that curved her lips, which the past evening had brought there, had scarcely had time to fade before she had reached the last words.

“DEAR COUNTESS MIRAMAR,—It was kind of you to write to me. You would, I am sure, tell me the truth, and I gather from your letter that you do not doubt of Dolly's happiness. You believe me, I hope, that had I had the power, I would have wished to

assure it myself. This maybe is a better, surer way. I should like to have seen her, spoken to her myself, and it was only at her own request I had postponed doing so. Now I regret that I did not take the matter into my own hands, and follow her at once. It is perhaps vanity or prejudice, but every one is inclined to believe he would have had no doubts, if he could only have seen for himself."

The smile faded as Dolores read, the writing was Jerome's, but the letter was not like his; there was an insistent shadow of anxiety, real anxiety, which she was not inclined to associate with him. She folded it and returned it to the Countess; she made no comment, and it was received in silence, a breathless silence, in which the eyes of mother and daughter met, as if some word had been expected, and then, as it did not come, there was a quick burst of talk, as if to hide the too perceptible pause.

It was late before Dolores found herself in her room, her last night here. There had seemed a great deal to say before she could say good night, but late as it was, when she was at length alone, she did not go to bed, but seated herself at the little writing-table.

She was very tired, and at any time a letter was a painful task, and above all such a letter as this, but these drawbacks did not dissuade her. She did not stop to choose her words; she did not even read the letter over, but stamped and directed it before lay-

ing her tired head on the pillow, after placing it on her table, where she should see it the first thing in the morning.

Two days later Jerome Shore received a line from the Countess acknowledging his letter, which he gave to Dorislaus to read. He made no remark beyond, "I think that she is happy—I pray it may be so."

There was another letter awaiting him, which he took up afterwards, and there was a sudden throb of his heart as he recognised the familiar, childish writing. He rose nervously and walked to the window before reading it.

"MY DEAR CAPTAIN SHORE,—The Countess Miramar showed me your letter to her, and I think it is best for me to write myself. I did not tell her I was going to. You know it is very difficult for me to write letters, but I am sure you will understand that I want you to know that I am very happy; that directly I saw Jem, who has always loved me all my life, I seemed to understand things quite differently. When he went away I was too young to know. I want you, please, not to be unhappy about the past; I shall not forget it, I should not wish to, because you were always so very good and kind to me, but if you had married me I am sure you would have been sorry, and then so should I. Now I hope that some day I shall hear that you also are quite happy, and then I shall know that

you can think of me without any trouble or sorrow. It is really best not to meet, I could only say what I am writing, that I have nothing I regret in leaving England except my dear sister, whom I love more and more every time I see her, though, after all, it will not be so very long before we meet again, if all goes well."

There was no ending beyond the once familiar signature, "Dolly."

Jerome Shore understood the letter very well, could interpret, if he so chose, the thought that had guided each word. Dolores's clear guileless motives and actions were never far apart. It was part of his just punishment, he constantly felt, that she should be so sweet and good, so innocently desirous of making him happy. Happiness, which he certainly did not deserve, he always felt, when those haunting eyes which he could not forget now and then rose out of the past, or the scent of jasmine disturbed his reveries.

But then happiness is not accorded to our just merits; it is a capricious treasure, as likely as not to fill the empty hands of the idler, as those of the toilworn worker.

But in the midst of his own remorse and self-reproaches, it was almost impossible to contemplate Virginia's preparations with satisfaction, to listen to her sharp worldly speeches with calm. Once in his first despair he had uttered his self-reproaches aloud

before her, showing some sign of the perplexity and trouble that tore his own soul, the battle that was raging between love and fidelity. Looking up, he had caught Virginia's shadowy mocking smile, and his voice had immediately taken a fresh note of calmness and decision.

"This is only a time of waiting," he said, unusual defiance in his tones, "a limited time: I have written to Dolly, and told her that I shall wait, as she wishes it, before seeing her, but that afterwards I shall go to England."

"And for how long does this limited time last?"

Virginia's voice was not raised, there was calm inquiry in her voice, a little amusement in her eyes.

"Six months," he replied, unwillingly.

"A long time, is it not? I am afraid, Jerome, Dolly's faith is a little shaken to require such a test."

"She has asked no test." Jerome was standing by her side, he spoke very low. "Everything is at an end, as far as she is concerned, but I," raising his voice a little, "am going to wait six months, and then follow her, and see if I can persuade her to trust me again."

For a moment Virginia looked at him, at the evident signs of trouble in his face, then, ever so slightly, shrugged her shoulders.

"My dear Jerome," she said, quietly, "I really think you are insane, so I shall not attempt to

reason. Dolly," she added, a moment later, "is wiser than I ever imagined, and on that unexpected wisdom I shall build my hopes."

And the event justified her hopes, though she was not destined to be gratified by discovering it; the subject was never alluded to between brother and sister again, which was easy of accomplishment, as Jerome pointedly avoided all approach to it, and Virginia always steered clear of unpleasant useless conversations.

Besides, her wedding-day was close at hand now, she was within a month of the date fixed for it, when the news of Dolores's engagement reached her.

Through Jerome. He was too loyal to her to leave her to discover it from other sources, though it cost him a great deal to tell her. He was strangely white, she thought, lifting her eyes as he entered her gaudy Paris *salon*, and he walked straight over to the window without giving her the kiss, with which he generally greeted her. Something was wrong, her instinct told her, as for a minute he remained silent, and then, without turning his head, "Dolly is going to be married," he said, very distinctly.

For one second a terrible fear possessed her, but his attitude, his voice, immediately undeceived her.

"To whom?" she questioned, a thrill of anxiety in the words.

"To James Traherne, the son of the people who brought her up."

“It is a suitable—happy”—there was a slight pause before the word—“marriage, so it appears. I wished to tell you,” he walked over to where she sat, “but I cannot say anything about it.”

It was after that visit he had written the letter which Dolores had read. Perhaps it was not alone his own self-reproach that had prompted it, but a consciousness of the smile of triumph that had curved Virginia’s lips, if he had looked to see it.

Dolores’s little letter he did not speak of ; Virginia, as he had wished, never alluded to the subject again, though she noticed, with that keenness which never forsook her, that he looked less ill and anxious ; time, she decided, was showing him all he had gained, time was bound to do that. She selected and sent to Dolores a bracelet, a queer, foreign-looking twist of gold, fastened with black enamel, and Erinnerung in gold letters written across it ; she had designed it herself. Virginia’s presents, like everything about her, were always distinctive. With it she wrote a few kind words, ignoring all but the past friendship which had at one time drawn them together, and it touched Dolores deeply to be remembered by her at such a moment. But no one forgot her ; it seemed as if every one was anxious to testify to her memory. The Countess Miramar had claimed a mother’s right, and,—denied the privilege of the marriage taking place from her house,—had provided everything else that a daughter could hope for. And, in addition, there were many treasures which

Jem had to be shown whenever he arrived. Though he did not wonder, nothing that Dolly's sweet unselfish tenderness had gained could ever surprise him; still the visible recognition, the kind letters, filled him with tender pride.

The letter from the Princess, that Dolores had read so often; the lovely, delicate, gold necklace that had accompanied it, and the photographs, which perhaps she was almost inclined to prize more—two photographs in the same silver-wrought frames as the one that held the little boy—one a picture of the beautiful blond woman, who had filled her childish heart with such boundless admiration; the other, the tall slight man, whose dark eyes looked at her with that tragic sorrow that no happiness could quite banish. With them had been a slip of paper, and the name "Dorislau" written across it.

He also was in Paris, and it was through his Excellency the news had reached him, and in the midst of his own passionate happiness he had been able to feel really glad. It had pained him to associate the troubled look in Dolores's sweet childish face with Jerome, his earliest, truest friend. His Excellency—but in truth he had resigned the office which so long had been his! He was going to travel, he said, and see the world; it was late to begin, but one had to get through a certain amount of sight-seeing some time, and circumstances hitherto had hindered him. In the meanwhile the approaching marriage of Miss Shore occupied his thoughts a great

deal ; it was to take place in Paris, from the house occupied by the Princess, and everything that pomp and state could do to add to its solemnity was to be done.

Afterwards, when it was all over, and the great wave had receded, leaving peace behind, Dorislaus and the Princess were to be married.

“Not just yet,” the Princess had said, but pleadingly, with her hand in that of Dorislaus, her eyes lifted to his.

Far away in quiet little Ingelheim there had been erected a monument in the Cathedral to the memory of the child, whose steps had faltered on the very threshold of life, and once more, before she quitted the shadow and entered into all the happiness that life yet offered, the Princess wished to go thither, and bid her last farewell to the past. She wished it, and it had been therefore so arranged.

The streets of Ingelheim were gay with flags, as in her deep mourning, shrouded in her long veil, she passed by his Excellency’s side towards the Cathedral. The wherefore did not strike her till, at the swift sound of wheels, she turned her head to note the carriage passing her—a carriage in which was Virginia, graceful and elegant as ever, dressed in white, a great bunch of “La France” roses in her hands, by her side the upright figure of Prince Waldenberg.

“The bride.” His Excellency’s voice gave words to her flash of thought. “How thoroughly she is enjoy-

ing it! I am sure this is the happiest, proudest moment of her life. She has shortened the honeymoon, so as to take possession of the realities a little sooner."

The Princess did not reply. He felt the hand tremble that rested on his arm; he was sorry that such a memory of the past as this sight had evoked, should have risen to trouble her.

"Ambition, Princess," he said, quietly, "like everything else, love, for instance, has its royal moments."

"Yes," she faltered. "Do you compare them?" she added, a moment later.

"No, I do not compare, I only say that whatever one may really desire, it is a pity not to reach and enjoy the one moment, a very rare moment, I may tell you, when all the past toil is as nothing, because you are seated on the throne, and the crown is on your brow. And at this moment I am sure that blissful golden hour belongs to Virginia Waldenberg."

"I, too," the Princess's low strange voice vibrated with sudden passion, "have reached my golden hour."

And then they were standing in the solemn hush of the Cathedral, before the sculptured Memory, which was all that remained to speak of the eager fair-haired child.

She did not weep, she stood in silence before the white marble sleeping figure. The small hand, on which the rounded cheek rested, the curls pushed back from the brow; quiet, calm, where she could only remember eager, stirring life.

She sighed. "It is beautiful, but it is not my son, at least it does not seem so to me."

"It is death," the old man answered gravely, "not life, and the shadow of death remains, the life is elsewhere."

He fancied he heard a sob as they turned away, but the Cathedral was dark, and her veil very close and thick, but though his own heart ached at the desolation hers must know, "Better that," he thought, "better such consummation than the happiness that Virginia knows to-night."

In the doorway she paused and looked back once to the sleeping marble child, in the gloom of the dim old church—the tribute of a people's respect; but, after all, a child's best monument is in its mother's heart—when forgotten there, there is little need to keep up the semblance of memory elsewhere. She would not forget, but she was one of those women with whom the capacity for such intense passionate life existed, that all familiar joys were doomed to eclipse in the strong light which glowed now across her path. The shadows in such case may fall blacker and thicker, but it is the contrast which is the effective antidote. Such brilliant, glorious, intense moments as she had known, must all have their purchase price somewhere.

"Life is a sturdy foe."

It is not given to many to walk with him side by side in friendliness; it is more often at the sword's point we are destined to wrest from him the treasure

he holds, and which we esteem to be ours of right. Dorislaus had fought well, the old man thought as he stood in the dim little church by the side of the Princess, and took her to be his wife; stray rays of sunshine stealing through the windows reddened her glorious hair, under the shadow of her veil the vivid blue of her eyes deepened. There was a touch of grey, the keen-eyed watcher noted, in the man's smooth dark hair, that told a story of which nothing else remained.

It was a great wedding, and made a stir in a certain section of society; there was something romantic about it, too, though the details were unknown, except to the eagle-eyed old man and blond-haired Jerome Shore. But it wanted the splendour of Virginia's, which had so short a time before preceded it. After all, the Princess was a widow, and in mourning; thus the guests excused the gravity which all felt distinguished the occasion.

But it was not of the pomp and ceremony of the previous marriage in this same church that Jerome Shore was thinking, as he stood there listening to the familiar responses, but of the little English girl, who a month ago had stood before the altar in the far-off English village; of her soft shy eyes and earnest simplicity, of the low voice that had faltered the vows, and of the strong, loyal, young heart that would keep them.

"I hope, I pray she may be happy," he found his thoughts had strayed to that wish that was a prayer.

Jerome's grey eyes were not as glad and careless as they used to be; he had found out also the sharpness of the sword life carries, and there was a shadow over the future, fair as it promised to become, which would never have been there if Dolly's happy young eyes had not looked into his, full of trust and confidence. But "Life pays."

It is a law which we cannot escape, and a just one, seeing life is all we have wherewith to pay, and our debts are so many and great. Even from Dolores some price had been demanded, which she was vaguely conscious of, as she stood by Jem's side in the village church; but she was not speculative or analytical, she was only aware that she was older, a great deal older, than these two flaxen-haired girls with whom she had grown up side by side for so many years, but she did not grudge the cost of the growing older; she had lost something, a something which perhaps we must always lose somehow, but "we are taught through our lost illusions," and Jem's strength and devotion and tenderness would never have seemed so invaluable, if she had not known what it was to stand quite alone, with no one on whose love she could count as a right. And though that which we gain in experience, we are apt to lose in freshness, we must be content to work with the materials we have.

There was not a fear of the future, not a backward look to the past, as Dolores put her hand into her husband's and set sail for the New World.

"But Virginia Shore or Princess Waldenberg is the only one on whose happiness I would stake my all, ten years hence," his Excellency observed to Dorislaus, as he stood by his side, wishing him good-bye.

"Why do you speak of her now?" Dorislaus replied, impatiently. "And you do not mean what you say; you know, no one better, the value of what she has gained."

"My dear Dorislaus, it is a pity she is not here to prove to you your mistake. Savages, you know, are quite satisfied with cowries and beads, until they leave their barbarous lands, and discover that in civilised places nothing can be had in exchange for them——"

"And do you accuse me of trusting to cowries and beads?"

"Oh, not I; but Virginia, who knows more on the subject than any of us, says cowries amuse children, and have a fictitious value among savages, but that if you want to get your money's worth in civilised lands you must use the coinage of civilisation, and it is of that coinage she holds a supply. No, in ten years' time, I repeat, when you are beginning to discover how much your little has cost you—she——"

"Well?" questioned Dorislaus, as he paused.

"She will be looking as young as she does to-day, and be receiving hour by hour the returns for her judicious outlay. Most people are either extravagant

or miserly; there are very few who know exactly how to get a fair return for their money."

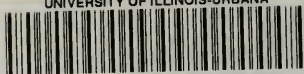
"Say something different from that before we part," Dorislaus said, after a moment's silence. "At this moment do not shadow my future with cynicism."

"It is a weak weapon as compared with earnestness and love," the old man answered, slowly, "you have earned the right to despise it."

THE END.



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